Gentleman of China

A NOVEL

BY

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CHAPTER I

A FRIGHTENED and bewildered man was pushed none too gently into the prisoner's dock He was of the coolie class, a son of the soil, and evidently strange to the ways of the city. He gazed fearfully at a table on which a Chinese detective was arranging a miscellaneous display of articles. Among these were a camera, a pair of field-glasses, several shirts, a wrist-watch and a few silver-plated forks and spoons.

The Chinese detective entered the witness-box to tell succinctly of having seen the accused loitering suspiciously outside premises in the Bubbling Well Road. Concealing himself in a shrubbery, he had watched while the accused made a felonious entry, to emerge by another window carrying a sack. There followed a story of a chase through deserted streets, culminating in the arrest several hours later

An Englishman, giving his name as Harold Whitby and his occupation as assistant manager of the Shanghai and North China Banking Corporation, identified the articles spread out on the table as his own property. When he had gone to bed on the night in question the articles had been in his home, No. 381 Bubbling Well Road. When he had awakened they were gone. No, he had not seen the accused.

Further evidence was given that eighteen finger-prints, since identified clearly as those of the accused, had been found upon the burgled premises.

Since the accused was ignorant of the Shanghai dialect, being a native of Wuhu, all this was laboriously translated for him by an interpreter. Had he anything to say in his own defence?

"He says," translated the interpreter, smiling as he did so, "that the detective is a great liar. There was no chase through the streets. He went to a pawnshop where, he had been told, stolen property could be sold. There two men seized him and

took him to a house by the river and then, after several hours, the detective came and brought him to the police station."

"What is all this about the house by the river?" asked the Magistrate, addressing the detective, who disclaimed all knowledge.

"Does he admit breaking into the house and stealing the articles?" asked the Magistrate.

"Yes," replied the interpreter, "but he says that the rest is lies."

"Has this man any previous convictions?" asked the Assessor, an Englishman, who occupied the bench with the Magistrate, a Chinese, for this was the International Mixed Court of Shanghai.

The detective replied negatively.

There was a brief consultation between Magistrate and Assessor, at the end of which the accused was sentenced to six months imprisonment as a first offender. "Tell him," said the Assessor to the interpreter, "that he will be well advised to return to Wuhu, for we have enough criminals in Shanghai already."

The Court was then adjourned until the afternoon.

The Chinese detective, wearing an expression reminiscent of the cat that found the cream, looked hopefully towards the bench for a few words of praise for his diligence. But he looked in vain. He was not altogether happy when he saw his chief, no less a man than Chief Detective Inspector Willoughby, leave the precincts of the Court with the Assessor. The former, although taking no part in the case, had sat through the proceedings with the utmost attention.

"You know, Willoughby," the Assessor was saying as they went off together, "there's something about this case that stinks. There have been too many like it lately. Crimes, if you know what I mean, are just not committed and solved so neatly. I smell something very, very fishy. How comes it, for example, that lately four or five of your Chinese detectives have been gifted with second sight? The cases seem to fall into a pattern. Perfect strangers without criminal records, mark you, arouse suspicions. They then commit burglaries. They are never caught *as they leave the premises*, but usually some hours afterwards. Why the delay? Why aren't they caught

as they leave? It should be easy enough, while the burglar is inside, to whistle up help and catch the men red-handed."

"Aren't you being a little hard?" asked Willoughby, who was not feeling quite comfortable. "When my department is inefficient, you let me know all about it—in public, too. Now, it seems, you're complaining that it's too efficient. Have you the smallest doubt about the guilt of the man you have just sentenced?"

"No, of course not!" snapped Assessor Morton. "If I had had doubts I would have acquitted the man. He was guilty, all right, but—and you know this as well as I do—the Chinese detective perjured himself The facts were not as stated. Also, since we are talking about the matter, I don't like these references to the 'house by the river'. What does it mean? What house by the river? At least six men lately—all of them ignorant coolies like the man to-day, and all of them from outside Shanghai—have admitted the main charges against them, but have denied the details of arrest. They have all spoken of this 'house by the river'. I don't like it, Willoughby. I'm saying so to you now—privately, but if it goes on I shall say so from the bench. There's another thing: *all* the stolen property has been recovered in *all six* cases. It smells to high heaven, Willoughby . . ."

"But you must admit, Morton, that never in your experience has there been so little burglary and crime of that kind. . . ."

"Are you asking me to believe that the criminal classes of Shanghai have suddenly reformed?"

"No, but I'm asking you to believe—and the weight of evidence supports me—that the efficiency of the police has improved to the point that the hardened criminal doesn't think it worth while taking the risks. That's why we are catching only these bungling amateurs."

"I don't believe that either, Willoughby," said Assessor Morton, fixing the other with a pair of shrewd eyes, "and nor do you."

Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby was relieved when the brief conversation was ended by the Assessor, who, hailing a rickshaw, went off to his lunch. His long experience in the Shanghai Municipal Police force had told him—hence his appearance in the Court to-day—that all was not as it seemed.

Nevertheless, he did not appreciate being told so in such a blunt fashion. As he went off to his own lunch he, too, wondered about the "house by the river", but being a very good policeman, he did not wonder too much. Results were what mattered and, he reflected with some satisfaction, he was giving results.

Meanwhile, smarting under a sense of injustice, which was quite illogical, since he was guilty as charged, the accused man was being bundled into the Black Maria for transfer to prison This humble man, by name Ah-ling, would have time over the next months, in the intervals of stone-breaking and other hard labour, to collect his muddled thoughts. His first instinct was to believe himself betrayed, but this theory he was forced to abandon reluctantly. Betrayal was quite impossible, for he had not confided his plans to anyone except in a purely general way. The decision to burgle the foreigner's house had been taken on the spur of the moment. The detective had proved himself a liar by speaking of a sack. There had been no sack. The stolen goods had been carried away concealed about his person. This talk of a chase had been nonsense, too. Ah-ling had walked in leisurely fashion down the Bubbling Well Road and on to where the Nanking and Honan Roads intersected. Here, mingling with the late crowds of the amusement district, he had turned left into Chapei, where he had cheap lodgings. The lodging-house was one much frequented by Wuhu men who came to Shanghai. One of these had given him the name of a "fence" through whom stolen goods might be negotiated. A price had just been agreed when two men entered the shop. Ah-ling remembered vaguely a blow on the back of the head, and the next thing he knew was that he was in a *sampan*, being rowed upstream. The *sampan* had stopped at a large house which had its own private pier. Here he had been thrown into a dark room alone. An hour later, or perhaps a little more, the door opened and in walked the lying detective, who had thereupon taken him by rickshaw to the nearest police station. If these were Shanghai ways, Ah-ling mused, the sooner he returned to Wuhu the better.

* * * * *

That same afternoon, while the wretched Ah-ling was having his first introduction to prison life and discipline, a seemingly unrelated interview took place.

In the sumptuous offices of the Shanghai General Insurance Company, Ltd., Mr Gordon Burnside, its chief executive, sat at his desk in a rare mood of indecision. His success in life was due to a quick judgment which, over the past twenty-five years spent on the China coast, had seldom proved wrong During those twenty-five years, furthermore, there had been few occasions when he had permitted himself to compromise with conscience. He believed in straight dealing, not only because he believed that straight dealing was good business, but because any other kind of dealing offended his sense of the fitness of things. Ordinary plain honesty, however, he had discovered over the years, was like truth, hard to define and pin down. The conception of honesty he had learned at his mother's knee in far-off Scotland differed in many respects from the conception of honesty held in China, by men whom he was free to admit were no less honest than himself. This much he had learned, and it stood him in good stead that the West cannot interpret the East accurately in terms of the West. The East, likewise, failed accurately to assess the West in the strict terms of the East. Somewhere, despite Rudyard Kipling, there was a meeting-ground between the East and the West, but only a privileged few were able to find it.

The Company had on its books, as an example of this, Chinese policy-holders of such proven integrity that they had merely to make a claim verbally and it would be paid at once. Only a few days previously one of these persons, a rice merchant, had received a shipment of rice from Saigon. Out of some 7,000 bags of rice received there had been a claim for 551 bags damaged by sea-water Gordon Burnside *knew*, with as great a certainty as if he had been down to the wharf to inspect and count them personally, that the precise number of bags damaged had been 551 and that the degree of damage was as stated. He knew, too, that had he, or any other officer of the company, questioned the count, or any other part of the transaction, the consequences would have been incalculable. The knowledge and understanding of these things were the reasons why Gordon Burnside sat

where he sat, and why, under his able management, the company was in a well-nigh impregnable position financially. The Chinese, in business as in every other walk of life, were not easy people to understand, but to those who were privileged to see a little behind the façade there was much to be learned and envied.

All the company's policy-holders, however, did not fall into the same category as the honest rice merchant, and it was because of these others, whose standards of integrity were not of the same order, that Gordon Burnside was perplexing himself. He did not relish the coming interview, but with a firm hand he struck the bell on his desk.

The door of the private office opened softly to admit Quong, the compradore of the company, through whose capable hands passed all the purely Chinese business. Quong was a fat, jolly man, who, until one saw his shrewd, darting eyes, looked easy-going and altogether benign. His diction in English was something between that of a butler and a bishop. To Gordon Burnside he directed a smile which seemed to say: "I know you don't like this, but wait until you have heard everything."

A moment or two later there entered the office a tall, aristocratic Chinese, superbly poised and with a gracious—almost condescending—manner.

"Allow me to present the honourable Kung," said Quong in English.

"I am," said Kung, "the President of the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society."

"Quong has already told me of your praiseworthy benevolence," said Burnside with a polite but somewhat frigid bow, "but he has not told me of the precise form it takes. That, I felt, I should hear from your own lips. True benevolence is so rare, do you not agree?"

Quong looked anxiously at Burnside, who, by polite standards, was being far too direct. A few observations of a purely general character would have been more in accord with the occasion.

"The poor rice crop this year has been the cause of great suffering among the masses," observed Kung.

"Alas! yes," agreed Burnside piously.

"Famine and crime, it would seem, walk hand in hand," said Kung sadly. "Hunger drives men to great follies."

As demanded by courtesy, the exchange of platitudes continued for several minutes, approaching slowly to the kernel of the matter. Burnside, whose back was to the light, chose this time to study his visitor narrowly. That Kung was a man of breeding there could be no doubt, but there was little to be read from his face except that here was a man in complete control of himself. Kung had the strange, ageless quality of many Chinese of the upper classes. He might, Burnside mused, be any age between thirty and fifty. Most rare of all, he had a straight aquiline nose, while his skin inclined to be translucent, having none of the parchment quality common to his race. The face was redeemed from too much severity and hauteur by eyes which, even while this exchange of courtesies continued, glinted with humour. Burnside found it disconcerting to realise that his visitor was enjoying himself.

"Crime," Kung was saying, "is lamentable at all times, but"—the talk was approaching the kernel now—"it is the more lamentable because it can involve your honourable company in such heavy losses. I shudder to contemplate the consequences if, for example, large numbers of criminals from other parts of China were to descend upon Shanghai. Thieves would break into the houses of honest men and riches of incalculable value would be stolen . . . and what injustice! It would be your honourable company which would have to bear these losses."

"I agree," said Burnside coolly, "that such a situation as you envisage could affect my company to its disadvantage, but you must not forget that these are risks which we take with our eyes open. These are matters, you will understand, which we have calculated, and so far"—he spread his arms as though to point out the magnificence of the office and its appurtenances—"so far we have managed to survive."

"Your honourable dealing, no less than your prudence, are bywords throughout China. Nevertheless, even to an ignorant person like myself, it is evident that an absence of crime works to your profit."

"I observe," said Burnside, "that your well-known benevolence does not blind you to the difficulties of a business such as ours."

This was the moment for Burnside to ask what form the other's well-known benevolence took, but he did not do so.

It was for Kung to explain his mission. This, choosing his words carefully, Kung proceeded to do.

"Doubtless, you ask yourself, but are too polite to ask me, how all this talk of famine and crime and profits and losses, subjects which are highly distasteful to us both, can possibly concern you. Permit me, if I am not too abrupt, to explain how I dare to come to you on this errand."

"The pleasure of a visit from you," said Burnside courteously, "is its own excuse How could I question it?"

"I come," said Kung, leaning forward a little in his chair, "as a humble beggar, seeking your charity I come on behalf of the poor, the oppressed and the unfortunate, those who, if someone does not heed their cries, could become—criminals. The Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society, of which I have the honour to be President, already cares for some eight hundred unfortunates, some of them, alas! criminals. Their numbers grow and will continue to grow, but the resources of my society do not grow, and unless we have more funds the work must come to an end."

"My company," said Burnside abruptly, "will be happy to donate one thousand dollars to your society's funds."

"For your generosity," said Kung, showing no disposition to leave, "heaven will reward you. I am, however, emboldened to continue by a saying of my illustrious ancestor* who once said that it is harder to be poor without murmuring than to be rich without arrogance. The poor are murmuring: I merely echo their murmurs."

"The illustrious Kung," said Quong, who had up to this point remained silent, "does not merely seek charity. He comes with an offer to help the company in return for—its benevolence."

"I will leave you now," said Kung, rising to his feet and bowing to Burnside. "Doubtless there must be discussion of the matter, which I have proposed in some detail to the respected Quong. When you are ready to discuss matters further with me, I will make it my pleasure to wait upon you. If, on the other hand, you would honour me by a visit to my humble house by the river, where you would be able to see for yourself the work of the society, my happiness would be overflowing."

* In China many persons bearing the surname Kung claim descent from the Great Sage Confucius.

Kung was gone. Despite slow and dignified movements, his disappearance had been almost magical.

Burnside and Quong had come up in the world together. Their long association, culminating in a close friendship and understanding, had taught each of them a high regard for the qualities of the other When they disagreed, which was seldom, their disagreement sprang from racial differences, an inability to see certain things through the same eyes.

"Well?" asked Burnside, relapsing into English. "Our friend did not seem overjoyed by the gift of a thousand dollars. I suspect that he had a larger sum in mind."

"To me in a private conversation he did admit that a somewhat larger sum was in his mind, but . . ."

"How much larger, Quong?"

"The precise sum he mentioned to me, Mr Burnside, was—er—two thousand times larger."

"Two million dollars?" exclaimed Burnside aghast. "What in hell does he think this is?"

"The sum seems somewhat large, I will admit," said Quong, who would be thankful when the next bridge was crossed, "but he offered many—er—compensating advantages, advantages which, I believe, we should be unwise to overlook."

"Have you gone stark, staring, raving mad, Quong? What do you suppose the Board of Directors is going to say to me if I go to them with a story like that? I'll tell you what they'd say. They'd say that poor old Burnside has been out East a bit too long. Time he was retired on a pension to Scotland. I'll admit I could do with a bit of fishing, but not yet, Quong, not yet."

"I think, Mr Burnside, that the attitude of your directors would depend largely on what Kung had to offer in exchange for the two million dollars."

"What *can* the man offer?"

"Perhaps five millions, perhaps ten millions, perhaps more. Who knows?"

"Out with it! Go on, Quong, and we'll see which of us is crazy . . ."

"We have both noticed, Mr Burnside, that burglary claims have dropped lately to the lowest point in the company's history. Why is that, do you suppose?"

"These things happen, man. You know that. Perhaps recently the police have been more efficient than usual, but whatever the reason, claims will rise again to average. They always do."

"Mr Burnside," said Quong, speaking with great emphasis, "burglary claims have dropped because of one man."

"And that man?"

Quong nodded towards the chair where Kung had been sitting.

"You are sure of what you say?"

"I am sure," replied Quong gravely. "I am also sure," he continued, that the man who caused the claims to drop could, just as easily, cause them to—rise."

"By God!" exclaimed Burnside angrily. "I won't be threatened in my own office"

"Kung made no threats, Mr Burnside, neither to you or to me. He does not need to threaten, for the facts themselves are a threat. In the grounds of his house by the river Kung has built a small town where he houses and feeds—unfortunates."

"You mean criminals, is that it?"

"Many are criminals, yes. Most of them are the unfortunates who, driven by circumstances, will become criminals unless someone—someone like Kung—cares for them. If Kung cannot find from somewhere the money to continue his work, then there will be nobody to look after these unfortunates. They will be thrown into the streets. In a little time they will become criminals, and that in turn will be reflected in rising claims against the company. It is just as simple as that, Mr Burnside."

"Send Kung the thousand dollars. That was a promise. But not a penny more, not a penny more. Frankly, I am amazed at your attitude, Quong. This is nothing more or less than a hold-up by a criminal organisation. We might gain some temporary advantage by submitting to Kung's extortion, but in the long run we should be sorry. Kung would have us in his power. He could raise his demands and we would have to pay. No, Quong, I won't have any part in it. I was taught as a small boy that an honest man does not compromise with dishonest men. I have tried to live by that and now—well, I'm going to go on trying."

"I was taught, Mr Burnside, that when a tidal wave

approaches, the wise man seeks high ground. Perhaps in Scotland—who knows?—there are no tidal waves, but here in China we have them, and I—I try to be a wise man."

Gordon Burnside returned home that night with a troubled mind. It was not the first time he had encountered a situation where the Western and the Eastern outlooks were as poles apart. Quong, he knew full well, would never have brought Kung to the interview unless he had believed that there were valid reasons for doing so, for Quong over the years had learned more about the workings of the Western mind than he, Burnside, had been able to learn about the Eastern.

The Shanghai General Insurance Company carried a large proportion of the burglary and kindred risks written in Shanghai and the Northern Treaty ports. The company's interest in an abatement of crime was, therefore, a very large one. Its business was wholly in China, which explained, doubtless, why it had been chosen by Kung from among the scores of other insurance concerns—mostly foreign—established on the mud-flats beside the Whangpoo River.

For a while Burnside contemplated taking the heads of these other insurance companies into his confidence with a view to concerted action, but he abandoned the idea because, as Quong had pointed out, there had been no threat. A direct threat would have been crude and Kung was not crude. Indeed, Burnside reflected, had the circumstances been otherwise, there was something likeable about this tall and dignified man who claimed, perhaps even with justification, descent from the Great Sage himself.

* * * * *

At the house by the river there was great activity, for it was the hour of the evening meal. In the barracks-like buildings which sprawled behind a dividing wall, so that they were invisible from the house itself, some eight hundred odd rice bowls were being filled, while from the kitchens there emerged huge platters of savoury pork and vegetables From the hungry way the food was regarded by those who lined up to receive it, it was evident that many had not for a long time seen a well-filled rice bowl. One man, lean to the point of starvation, his eyes deeply sunken in their sockets, wolfed the hot food so

quickly that he soon lay on the ground rolling in agony as his vitals were scalded. Several went out by the river to vomit as stomachs unaccustomed to good food refused to receive it

The babel of voices died down until there was little to be heard but the animal noises of hunger in process of being satisfied.

Most of those who sat at the long trestle-tables were the flotsam of Shanghai itself, but in little groups scattered about the dining-hall were men from Soochow, Hangchow, Chinkiang and Nanking, and a few even from higher up the Yangtsze River. These little groups, separated from the rest by the bar of a common language, huddled together for comfort, indulging in the nostalgic talk of exiles.

Misfortune was the only bond most of these men had in common. Some had deserved their misfortunes, others were merely victims of the economic storms, the floods, the droughts and other conditions beyond their control. Ever since recorded history had begun, it had been like this in China. Never in history had the industry, the patience and the thrift of the people—all three carried to extremes unknown anywhere else in the world—been able to provide for all the teeming millions of China. The Yangtsze and the Yellow Rivers in spate had been known to sweep away millions in a few hours, leaving as many more to starve because their fertile lands were for a season unfit to produce crops.

Like the silt brought down by the rivers from the heart of China, the unfortunates came to the great cities hopefully. The young and the strong—some of them—became human donkeys, until the killing work of pulling rickshaws or pushing wheel-barrows took away their youth and their strength. Here in this great dining-hall were those less, or as one cares to think of the matter, more fortunate. For the most part they were not young or strong enough to become human donkeys, so, since there was no other work open to them, they had been faced with three choices: they could join the great army of beggars, become criminals or, if they were too fastidious for either, starve.

Men in other lands, it may be argued, are faced with the same three choices, but their numbers are a few hundreds, or at most a few thousands. In China hundreds and thousands do not

convey the picture, for the unfortunates are counted in tens of millions. Here, in the house by the river, were a few hundreds, only a handful of whom were criminals in the true sense of the word. But all—all were potential criminals, the raw material of prison fodder, brought to desperation by conditions which their little minds could not understand. Because of this, because they had never dreamed of a place where twice daily there was a well-filled rice-bowl except in return for gruelling toil, their good fortune bewildered them as much as their previous ill-fortune. There was good tea unlimited here and even a little tobacco, but there were—as always—conditions.

When the last grain of rice had been taken from the last bowl and the empty bowls were being stacked at the ends of the trestle-tables, the babel was hushed by the silvery tinkle of a bell. Fear, vague nameless fear, seemed to hold sway. In the tinkle of the bell there was authority, and to these humble men authority spelled fear. It had always been so.

Through a door at the far end of the dining-hall, the end nearest to the fine house which was on the other side of the wall, came the tall, dignified figure of Kung. He did not have to call for silence, for silence had preceded him. Slowly, deliberately, he walked across to a small dais raised some four feet above the level of the floor. From this point of vantage he could see and, more important, be seen. Those who saw him saw one who was quite unafraid, and to men who had lived under the spell of fear for a long while, it was a strange sight.

For whole long minutes Kung surveyed the gathering in silence. "I trust, my friends," he said at length, in a gentle voice which carried, nevertheless, to the farthest corners of the hall, "that the evening rice sits well upon your stomachs. If there should be one among you who remains unsatisfied, let him raise his hand. Ours is simple fare, but there is enough." Kung's eyes roved round the dining-hall, but no hand was held up. "It is well," he continued with a grave smile, "for empty bellies drive men to great follies."

The tension of fear mounted. It rippled round the hall until it was almost visible. Wherever Kung's glance rested there were to be seen the whites of uneasy eyes. Kung remained silent for only a few seconds, but to those who watched him the

silence stretched out interminably. An emaciated man, who had just eaten the first square meal he had enjoyed for many months, burst into peals of hysterical laughter. Another, not knowing what he was doing, pressed the hot end of a cigarette into the palm of his own hand. His sharp scream of pain caused eight hundred pairs of eyes to turn in his direction. The man wept openly, not for the pain, but for the eyes turned upon him

"A good host," said Kung in his calm, gentle voice, "and I strive to be that, does not care to remind his honoured guests of their obligations, but there are times when expediency is more important than good manners. This is one of them. . . . Here are clean beds, simple food and a little tobacco. These, as you were each told when you came here, are yours until good fortune shall shine on you again. But there were conditions—conditions to which you agreed. You were told that you may come and go as you please, but that there was to be no stealing of anything in all Shanghai."

The only sound in the hall was now that of heavy breathing, although some of those who sat tensely to listen wondered that the beating of their own hearts was not clearly audible.

"Three men," continued Kung, "three men who for weeks past have enjoyed the hospitality of this poor house, who only last night emptied their rice-bowls here, have broken faith with —us. Not only with me, but with you—us. They were part of this community and they broke the laws of the community. Last night these contemptible creatures broke into the home of a charitable merchant, one of many who have donated the money which bought the rice you have eaten this evening. Not content with stealing valuable vases of pure silver, they beat this charitable merchant's aged mother, who even now hangs between life and death. Because of this I and all of us have lost much face. I, and I speak for myself, do not like to lose face in such a matter.

"Some might say that this is a matter for the police. But to me it seems that as this is a matter concerning our honour, we can solve it without help from the police. Those three men, my friends, are with us now. Look around you, look carefully, and it may be that their guilt will reveal itself. . . ."

Eight hundred pairs of eyes darted here and there all over

the hall, and then a strange thing happened, strange because the searching eyes saw nothing—except fear, which was everywhere. Suddenly, and nobody knew quite how, three cringing men seemed to be set apart from the others, who shrank instinctively away from them until their very isolation picked them out as with a searchlight.

"Come here!" called Kung, but this time his voice was not gentle.

A way was made for the three men. So great was their fear that they could not stand upright. They crawled like animals towards the dais where Kung awaited them.

"Stand upright like men and look at me," he ordered them. "There are no accusers so, if you are innocent, there is nothing to fear. Tell me, so that all present may hear, whether you are guilty of this thing."

Two of the men could not raise their eyes to meet Kung's, but the other, a little bolder, did so. "We did not intend to hurt the old woman," he said, "but she screamed and would have called the neighbours."

Then, his nerve now failing him, the man burst into a torrent of almost incoherent words. The three fell on their knees in front of Kung, begging for mercy.

"You have already had mercy," said Kung icily. "There was mercy here for you when you came to the door, homeless and hungry. The warm shelter and the well-filled rice-bowls, these were mercy. Now there is no more mercy left, only justice. Do not waste your time kneeling at my feet, for I am not your judge. Your judges are here—in this hall. Their judgment will be a just one, for they, too, have known misfortune. Like you, they came hungry and homeless to this door and, like you, they were welcomed without question. You have caused me and all of us to lose face and to break faith. If the charitable merchants of Shanghai can no longer trust the word of Kung, how long, think you, will it be before there are empty rice-bowls here?"

"Ah!" It came viciously and with understanding from every corner of the hall. It came from the hearts of men who had but recently been rescued from black despair, who had seen a slow death from starvation facing them. Now a cold,

clear light illuminated these three men who had endangered them all. To steal had not until this moment seemed a very grave crime, for to many of those present stealing had been limited only by opportunity. But these fearful men were no longer individuals. They were become a community and they sat in judgment upon three men who had endangered the life of the community.

"I will leave you now," said Kung, "for I do not want to influence your judgment." He disappeared through the door. There came the sound of heavy bolts being shot and then there was silence, save for the whimpering of the three men

There was no discussion. Not one more word was spoken, for judgment had already been rendered in eight hundred hearts.

There was no hurry or pre-arrangement, but a press of bodies soon surrounded the guilty three. Then a laneway was created leading towards the garden and the river. Just when it seemed that the three wretches would be trampled to death, they crawled away from the centre and down the only way open to them. As they crawled, so the press of their fellows followed closely. Long minutes passed as muscles, almost paralysed with fear, propelled them slowly across the garden. Soon the only laneway open was the wooden pier, beneath which swirled the deep water of the Whangpoo, whose swift tide was running out towards the main body of the mighty Yangtsze and the sea beyond.

Not a hand was raised against the crawling men, who had fallen strangely silent. There was no mercy in the angry eyes and they did not waste breath asking for mercy. At the end of the pier, which was reached after long, agonising minutes, the three men toppled over, and even the splash was drowned by the swirling of the water beneath.

Deep sighs of relief escaped those who had seen justice done, and then, relapsed into indifference, they shuffled back into the hall and towards the sleeping quarters.

Two of their number who had spent the day planning a robbery at a lonely house in the French Concession, exchanged a meaning look and went quietly to their beds. The flavour of the night's adventure had turned bitter before it began.

CHAPTER II

It was July, the month when only those who had no choice in the matter remained in Shanghai to face the humid heat. The wise and fortunate were taking the sea air in Japan, in Chefoo, Tsingtao and Hoshigaura, or relaxing in the hills at Kuling and Mokanshan.

Gordon Burnside, working late at his office under an electric fan, mopped his brow for the hundredth time that evening and continued to apply himself to a thick batch of reports. From these, judging by the blistering remarks which passed his lips from time to time, he was deriving no satisfaction. Quong, the corpulent compradore of the Company, perspiring freely under a plum-coloured silk gown, sat fanning himself until his chief should have digested certain essential facts. Although suffering appalling discomfort from the heat, Quong wore a certain air of satisfaction, the satisfaction which is so hard to conceal when one's predictions are justified by events.

The documents which held Burnside's attention were detailed accounts of robberies which had taken place over a period of six months in the northern ports. Silk to the value of three million dollars had disappeared from a riverside godown in Nanking. More than a dozen rice godowns in Nanking, Tientsin and Ningpo had been cleared of their contents. A well-known Chinese actress, while crossing the pavement from a theatre in Hankow to her waiting carriage, had been relieved of all her jewels, including a priceless emerald once the property of the Imperial Family. These and scores of lesser robberies represented a cash total of a little more than $11,000,000.

The two facts which, more than all else, disturbed Gordon Burnside were · that all these risks had been underwritten by the Shanghai General Insurance Company, and that none of the robberies concerned had taken place in Shanghai itself.

Claims of a similar nature made against other companies in the same period remained far below average.

A name hovered upon the lips of both Burnside and Quong, each hoping that the other would be the first to mention it. Quong refrained from tact, while Burnside refrained because on the few recent occasions when it had crossed his lips his blood pressure rose alarmingly. The name was that of a man who, six months previously, had sat in the chair now occupied by the perspiring Quong.

A third fact emerged from the quick perusal of a sheet of paper: that claims made against Burnside's principal rival company, the North China Mercantile, were the lowest in that concern's history.

"Well?" said Burnside heavily. "What have you to suggest?"

"I think," said Quong gently, "the time has come for another talk with the illustrious Kung."

To this observation Burnside did not trust himself to make any reply. "You have seen the North China Mercantile figures?" he asked.

"It would seem," said Quong silkily, "that their—benevolence is greater than our own. The Great Sage once said that it is the spirit of charity and benevolence which make a place good to dwell in, and that he who chooses a place for residence without regard to these qualities cannot be considered wise. I fear that before long we shall be reminded of this piece of wisdom by none other than the descendant of the Great Sage himself."

"In other words, you believe that Kung is behind all this?"

Quong nodded assent. "You will note also, Mr Burnside, that Shanghai still enjoys a relative freedom from this kind of crime. What will be the figures of claims when the criminal elements in Shanghai are no longer restrained? Remember that the wealth of Shanghai exceeds all these other cities put together. . . . What then, Mr Burnside?"

"I have told you before, Quong, and I repeat it: I will not submit to extortion."

"The peach tree would not submit to the typhoon, Mr Burnside. In proof of this the stump remains . . ."

"I'll try to manage to get along without your allegories,

Quong, if you don't mind. If this man Kung wants trouble, then, by God! I'm the man to give it to him."

Burnside rose from his desk and prepared to leave the office.

"There is one more matter, Mr Burnside . . ."

"What is it? Won't it wait until the morning?"

"No, Mr Burnside, it will not wait for the morning. To-morrow, when the office opens, I will be your loyal colleague. To-night I speak to you as a shareholder of the company. Indeed, I am the largest single shareholder. . . ."

"And as a shareholder, what have you to say to me?"

"I would like to sell you my shares, Mr Burnside. My loyalty to you will not permit me to throw them upon the market. You, therefore, are the only buyer."

"How many shares have you, Quong?"

"I have two thousand one hundred shares. At to-day's price they are worth a little over one million dollars."

"I haven't got a million dollars, Quong, and you know it."

"Then I will sell them to you for a margin payment of twenty per cent, the bargain to be concluded at the same time as the war with Kung is ended. For it will be war, Mr Burnside. To me our little bargain seems just, for it will be the measure of your confidence."

"And if I refuse?"

"To-morrow morning I shall sell my shares on the open market, for you must understand, Mr Burnside, that my soul rebels against what you are doing. War, even a just war which one has a chance of winning, is folly enough. But a war which you are bound to lose . . . that is madness. And you are bound to lose, Mr Burnside."

The Scot turned a pair of cold blue eyes upon the fat Chinese compradore. "If I had not had a hundred proofs of your loyalty, Quong, I would say that you were getting ready to sell out to the enemy."

"But you know in your heart, Mr Burnside, that this is not true. Your race and mine understand each other very well, but in certain matters our minds do not meet. This is one of them. Your destiny tells you to fight. Mine tells me to compromise. When this war starts I will be at your side. I will fight with you as though it were my war, but my heart will

be lighter for the knowledge that my shares in this honourable company are depreciating in value at your expense."

"As you will, Quong. I accept the bargain. We will draft an agreement in the morning."

"There is no need for an agreement on paper, Mr Burnside," said Quong with a hurt look.

"One of us might die," said Burnside "Have you thought of that?"

"It is true that one of us might die, but if such a sad thing should happen, then I believe the other would have suffered a loss much greater than a million dollars. The bargain then would have little meaning."

These two rarely showed any emotion, but as they shook hands warmly their eyes were a little misty.

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George Cleghorn, head of the North China Mercantile Insurance Company, sat at his usual table in the large dining-room of the Shanghai Club. This was one of the rare occasions when he had no luncheon guest. He was a large, florid man who loved the good things of life. He ordered his meal, therefore, with some care, failing to see that Gordon Burnside was crossing the room in his direction. It would have been easy to have arranged this luncheon together, but this Burnside had preferred not to do, for he wanted what he had to say to come as a surprise.

"Lunching alone, Cleggie?" he asked. "May I join you?"

Cleghorn concealed his discomfort behind a mask of enthusiasm. The rivalry between his company and Burnside's was very keen and he was aware that he had not in all matters adhered to the spirit of certain agreements made for mutual protection. His suspicions were, however, lulled by Burnside's eagerness to talk of anything except business.

As they ate the talk ran to racing and the prospects for the coming autumn meeting. Cleghorn mentioned with thankfulness in his voice that two days hence he was off to Japan for a month to escape the heat. Burnside mentioned that his wife was at Chefoo. "When are you joining her?" asked Cleghorn.

"I doubt," was the reply, "whether I shall get a holiday this summer."

"Is that wise, my dear chap?" asked Cleghorn solicitously. "You've been out here about twenty-five years, isn't it? These summers are no good for us. I wouldn't stay here for August no matter what had to be done. . . ."

"But then," said Burnside, striving to keep any intensity out of his tone, "it's different for you."

"Different? How different?"

"Well, you see, the difference is, Cleggie"—the cold blue eyes fixed the latter in their gaze—"that we run our shows on different principles. I, for example, didn't submit to Kung's extortions, and you, apparently, did. How much, Cleggie? How much did you pay?"

"Kung? What Kung? Shanghai's full of Kungs. I don't know what you're talking about, my dear chap."

"I'm talking about the benevolent Kung, Cleggie, the descendant of the Great Sage himself, the Kung to whom you paid, I estimate, somewhere between a million and two million dollars. Do you remember now?"

"Oh! *that* Kung!" said Cleghorn with an uneasy laugh, seeing that he could no longer maintain the pretence. "How much did you pay him?"

"I gave him a thousand dollars and, in so many words, told him to go to hell."

"So that's where he's gone. I haven't seen him for six months, or thereabouts. Well, he'll find lots of good company there, won't he?"

"Bloody funny! Remind me to laugh some time."

"You know, Burnside," said Cleghorn, "I should have thought you were too smart to turn down what Kung had to offer. All things considered, I thought his terms very reasonable."

"I wouldn't call submitting to blackmail smart—ever. I call it just plain cowardly and—in your case, dishonest."

"Now don't ride that high moral Presbyterian horse with me, Burnside, just because you didn't have the sense to put up an umbrella when you saw it was raining. What's dishonest about what I've done?"

" We have an agreement, Cleggie, or do you forget it? All the respectable companies agreed long ago to pool information of that kind."

" I remember the agreement as well as you do, Burnside, but it doesn't cover the kind of information we are speaking about."

" In the letter, perhaps not," said Burnside coldly, " but in the spirit, yes. And I happen to believe that it is the spirit of an agreement which counts. You, apparently, don't. . . . Thanks all the same, but I'll pay for my own lunch."

" I hope that in, say, twelve months from now you'll be able to, my lad," was Cleghorn's parting shot. " But I wouldn't count on it if I were you. Kung strikes me as a pretty smart fellow."

Gordon Burnside sat in solitary thought for some while after Cleghorn had left the table. A great weariness had suddenly seized him in its grip. He had taken a stand which so many Westerners had taken and, for the most part, failed to maintain. For all that it was called the Unchanging East, there had been changes, concessions made to the West. Of all places on earth, Shanghai had seen more of these changes than any other. In many matters, Burnside knew, he had made concessions to the East, becoming a party to bargains which, as these things are regarded in Scotland, would have been outside the pale. By submitting in moderation to time-honoured " squeeze ", Burnside had gained many business advantages, because he had known that " squeeze " was as much a part of the climate of China as the sun and the rain. It was inescapable.

" Squeeze " was one thing: compromise with criminals another.

" I won't do it! " he muttered, gritting his teeth. With unseeing eyes he walked out into the blinding heat of The Bund and towards his own office. He realised, now that it was too late, that it had been a tactical error to quarrel with Cleghorn so openly. It would have been more clever to have pumped the other and then left without disclosing his own hand too clearly. He realised, too, that for the future, if he were to achieve anything, he must control his feelings a little better. Nobody knew better than Burnside that the Westerner who loses his temper is at a great disadvantage in dealing with Easterners, who have learned to keep their emotions hidden below a placid surface.

From his private office Burnside telephoned to Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughly. "I'd very much like a chat with you, Willoughby," he said when the latter was on the line, "but, if you know what I mean, let us meet somewhere this evening as though by accident. Where do you suggest?"

"I'm dining aboard the *Empress of Russia* to-night," came the reply. "She's lying off Woosung. It'll be a nice trip there and back by launch. Why not join me?"

To this suggestion Burnside agreed hastily. It would be a relief to feel a little cool sea air playing upon him and, as probably there would be dozens of people aboard the launch, he and Willoughby would not be too conspicuous.

These two did not meet on the launch itself, for Willoughby was in the centre of a group of men who were talking very earnestly to him. After dinner, drawing two deck-chairs together in the cool night air, Burnside waited. When the detective put in an appearance, Burnside wasted no time. In brief, concise terms he related the facts as he knew them, culminating in the substance of the day's talk with Cleghorn. "What are you doing about it?" he asked bluntly.

"Nothing!" was the disconcerting reply. "What can I do? Nothing has happened—yet, nothing that gives me the smallest excuse for official action of any kind. This Kung, so far as I know, is a law-abiding man. There isn't a whisper of a complaint against him. More than that, if your information and mine is correct, he is responsible for the fact that there has been less burglary, housebreaking, pilferage and petty larceny in Shanghai for the last six months than any other six months since records have been kept. Kung, we both believe, is responsible. On the face of things we ought to give him a medal..."

"I'm not concerned with the face of things, Willoughby. Look what's happened in the outports. That gives you some measure of the man's power. My Company has lost eleven million dollars."

"You know, as well as I do, Burnside, that the Shanghai Police are concerned only with what happens in Shanghai. We have no jurisdiction or standing in the outports."

"Nevertheless, in my office and in the presence of Quong, my compradore, this Kung made an extortionate demand.

Damn it! Doesn't the sum demanded tell its own story? Who gives two million dollars to charity?"

"The North China Mercantile, probably," replied Willoughby with a grin. "But don't you see, on your own admission the demand was not accompanied by threats."

"The threat was implicit, and you know it. It was followed at once by the huge losses in the outports and it won't be long before the epidemic spreads to Shanghai. Then you'll have to take action. I'm telling you now—warning you in advance of what will happen."

"We'll take action, Burnside, against any criminals we catch. That goes without saying. But before we can take any action against Kung we've got to establish a connection between him and those criminals."

"You've ways to make them talk, haven't you?"

"Yes, and Kung has ways to make them keep silent. Look, Burnside, I'm on your side, even if I don't appear to be, but I have to play the game by hard and fast rules. We'll keep in touch closely, but in the meanwhile I'd like to drop a thought into your mind. I'd like you to forget your preconceptions of Kung and start from scratch. I know a great deal about Kung because I've had very careful inquiries made about him—very careful indeed. I've never seen him face to face. You have. Tell me, then, did Kung strike you as being, shall we say, of the criminal type?"

"No, very much the contrary. The man's an aristocrat to his finger-tips. He just oozes good breeding."

"That is my information, too," continued Willoughby.

"What's this idea you want to plant in my mind?" asked Burnside.

"Just this: that Kung may be just exactly what he purports to be. You've never thought of that, have you?"

"No, and I don't believe in fairies either."

"Look, Burnside. Don't be too hasty. We've both put in some twenty-five years in this country, and what has it taught us? I think it's taught us both that things are seldom quite as they seem. Let us suppose something for the sake of argument. Let us suppose that this Kung is somewhere about half-way between what he appears to be and what you and I

are inclined to believe he is. Let us suppose that by means best known to himself he is able to curtail the kind of crime we have been talking about; curtail it to something near nothing. Don't you think it just possible that Kung might be a great public benefactor?"

"No!" snapped Burnside. "Do you?"

"I'm not prepared to go so far as to say I believe that," replied the detective, "but I will say that I'm not prepared to close my mind to the possibility. I've heard some very queer stories about master Kung. Very queer indeed. Incidentally, the queerest of them all is that he really is descended from Confucius."

"Then he's descended the hell of a long way," said Burnside savagely. "I'm no authority on Confucius, although I've read the Analects. But I never found anything in them which gave licence to the man's descendants to practise blackmail. I'm telling you, Willoughby, that before we're many months older a lot of people are going to be asking why we pay the Shanghai Municipal Police if they can't protect us Insurance rates are liable to jump so high that nobody will be able to afford them. I was looking to you for help, but it seems I might have saved my breath."

"Don't worry on that score," said the detective soberly. "I'm your man—unofficially. Officially my hands are tied until something happens."

The meeting between these two men had been discreet enough, but not so discreet that it had escaped notice. That night its possible significance was a subject of discussion at the house by the river.

Kung, when this trifle of news reached him, was examining intently a stencil cut in cardboard. With him, waiting for approval, was the artist who had designed it. The design was simple enough, comprising a few clear-cut Chinese ideographs which, translated, meant: "In this house dwell benevolent persons." Beneath this was the "chop" of the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society.

"Take this to the metal-worker," said Kung at length, satisfied by his scrutiny, "and have five hundred of them made."

Glad that after many essays his design was now accepted, the

artist left Kung's presence hastily, as though in fear that he might change his mind.

"I am sorry," said Kung, turning to three young Chinese who sat respectfully waiting his pleasure, having brought the news of the talk between Burnside and Willoughby. "I am sorry that this Burnside, a good man, forces me to do things I do not wish to do."

The three young Chinese, all clad in plain black silk gowns, remained silent and impassive. They were strangely alike, these three, although not related. They shared one quality in common: the quality of self-effacement, the art of being inconspicuous. They shared other qualities also, loyalty to Kung being the chief of these.

"The Western mind," continued Kung in the tone of one giving a lecture, "is interesting and worthy of study. In many ways it is wholly admirable. I admire most its precision. This is as it should be, for in the West the problems of the people call for much precision. The West has learned that when ordering workmen to make a piston for a steam locomotive it is not enough to say that it must be made the breadth of two hands and the length from the tips of the fingers to the elbow. The thing must be done, I am told, to measurements calculated in ten-thousandths of an inch. To us this seems absurd, but it is not so. The proof of this lies in the excellence of the locomotives. So it is that in all those matters which require precision—and they are many—the Western mind far excels our own. It is when the Western mind applies the methods of precision to imprecise things that it appears to us somewhat childish. This man, the respected Burnside, for example..."

The three young men, whose interest had up to this moment been quite perfunctory, leaned a little forward in sign of eagerness.

"This Burnside," continued Kung, "worships precision. By means of precision he has built up a vast and honourable business. His faith in precision is so great that, although he does not know it, he is the slave of precision. To him life is a neat pattern. The colours are clearly defined. Its curves are segments of exact circles and its lines are ruled straight. When from time to time he finds that things are less accurately

delineated, he tries to compress them within his pattern. Then he becomes somewhat childish.

"I have only met him once. I knew as I sat in his office that I did not fit well into the pattern he has made for himself. For an astute man, his thoughts betray themselves too easily. 'This Kung,' he was saying to himself as we sat there, 'comes with polite phrases on his lips, but they mean nothing. This artful man is laying a trap for me. Beneath the honeyed words are a threat.'

"Now, because what I proposed to him differed from the neat pattern in his mind, he assumes that I am a criminal, an extortioner. Once having assumed that, he is guided by the pattern which leads him to the police.

"I have affairs which take me elsewhere to-night," Kung concluded. "Put your minds together and see if you cannot devise for me some way of proving to this Burnside that instead of being a dangerous criminal, I am his friend and would like to be his ally. I do not want him hurt in any way, for he is a good man. Nevertheless, it would do him no harm if he were touched in his vanity. A certain loss of face—but not too much—might help, but it will be necessary to show him at the same time that much harm might have been done to him had certain persons been, as he believes them to be, ill disposed. The matter is worthy of a little careful thought."

In the drive of the house there awaited Kung a smart victoria. All his life he had refused to avail himself of the more practical rickshaw, on the grounds that such labour degraded both puller and user.

Two well-groomed ponies were soon whirling him along The Bund at a great rate. The turn-out was known everywhere in Shanghai, never failing to attract the attention of people in the street. When the *mafoo* sounded a melodious bell, even the most congested traffic had a way of dissolving. The victoria turned off The Bund up the Nanking Road, past all the exclusive foreign shops which gave the lie to the thought that this was China. Stopping the victoria just before it reached the centre of the amusement district, Kung prepared to complete the journey on foot. In a few seconds, clutching in his hand a superb bouquet of yellow tea-roses, he mingled inconspicuously with the throng of pleasure-seekers.

Ducking under a low stone archway, Kung paused in a dark alley beyond. Here, if there had been any watcher to see, this proud man became strangely humble in his manner, even a little fearful. It required many seconds before he could bring himself to ring a bell which hung invitingly outside a small house. Almost at once a slit opened in the door. Kung became aware of being scrutinised.

"I do not know whether my mistress will receive you," said a gruff and impolite voice. "Wait!" The slit slammed shut and Kung was left alone with his thoughts.

In a little while the door was opened by a woman. "My mistress will receive you," she said in an off-hand fashion, "but she is tired after the performance and you must leave quickly."

Kung bit his lip with vexation. Every fibre in his being rebelled at this cavalier treatment, and yet—he sighed deeply at the knowledge—pride no longer seemed very important.

In a small salon, hung with richly-embroidered silks, there awaited Kung a dainty, almost doll-like girl whose age was difficult to determine because of her thickly-painted face. She was clad in trousers and a short jacket, both made of a shimmering satin in vivid imitation of mother-of-pearl shell. From her ears hung two immense diamonds, while around her neck was a collar of alternating diamonds and rubies.

The girl lolled upon a pile of cream satin cushions and, in defiance of the dictates of good manners, did not rise to receive her visitor. She was a tiny creature, as exquisite as a miniature, but as she smiled up into Kung's face she seemed to radiate insolence.

"What have you brought me?" she asked, omitting any greeting.

"These," he replied, unwrapping the tea-roses, "came from my garden in Soochow this morning. Because, of their kind, they are perfect, I brought them to you, my Pearl of the Morning."

"Roses! What good are roses to me?" was the contemptuous reply as the bouquet was pitched into the farthest corner of the room. "Lok-wen, the jeweller, showed me to-day the kind of roses I want. He has set them aside until you call to see them."

"If I were a rich man, I would shower you with such roses, but——"

"It is useless to plead poverty when, as all Shanghai knows, millions pour into your hands like water. I know what I know. It is common talk that every wealthy merchant in Shanghai pays you tribute. You talk of love until you make me feel sick. If, as you pretend, you loved me, you would go now to awake Lok-wen from his bed and bring me the stones on which I have set my heart. What is a mere eighty thousand dollars to the great Kung?"

In silence Kung offered up a prayer to the illustrious ancestors from whom he sprang, imploring them to lift the chains of his infatuation. But they ignored his plea.

"I have told you many times, my Pearl of the Morning, that if great sums pass through my hands they are not mine. I hold them in trust for others. In my own right I am a poor man. I have a little house and the garden which leads down to the Grand Canal at Soochow, and that is all. For the rest, I inherit a proud name—perhaps the proudest name in all China. Would you have me besmirch it?"

"I care nothing what you do with your name. It is your affair. I have no great name, except that which I have made for myself among the people. Pearl of the Morning has her songs and her beauty. The songs I sell nightly, as also the sight of the beauty. But the beauty itself I have not sold—yet, although there is no lack of offers from the richest men in all Shanghai. Only this evening the great Wang himself sent a messenger with an offer. Would you care to know how highly the great Wang assesses my beauty?"

"I do not want to hear. I do not want to contemplate the thought of you in the arms of this uncouth coolie who has risen to great riches, this evil-living animal who dribbles filth into his beard. . . ."

"Only eighty thousand dollars," said the girl mockingly, "and Pearl of the Morning is yours—for a little time. The great Kung talks much of love, but he wants for nothing what others will pay fortunes to possess. In such a case, tell me, what would your great ancestor have done—that is, if he was your ancestor?"

"He would, I hope," said Kung, mustering all his dignity,

" have done as I shall do. He would have left by the doorway which leads to virtue."

Kung was gone. The tinkle of malicious laughter followed him down the stairs and into the street. Before he rejoined the waiting carriage he found it necessary to stand awhile in the dark alley in order to recover his poise and manhood. The humiliation of his enslavement was almost too great to be borne.

Back in the privacy of his own quarters, Kung prostrated himself before the shrine of his ancestors, begging humbly for deliverance, for unclouded eyes which would at all times see this mercenary girl as, in moments of sanity, he knew her to be. It was not until dawn that sleep came to kill in his mind the picture of her slender body and the forbidden delights which it offered.

After a few hours of fitful sleep Kung summoned the courage to continue with the work to which he had set his hand, and, fully occupied with weighty affairs, the chains of Pearl of the Morning slipped from him for a while.

* * * * *

Gordon Burnside owned a very pleasant house, situated beyond the Bubbling Well in a new thoroughfare called the Yuyuen Road. The road itself was under the jurisdiction of the Shanghai Municipal Council and part of the International Concession, but the land on either side of the road was China proper, had the Chinese authorities ever cared to exercise their rights. Within two hundred yards of the Burnside house there was open country.

Burnside was an early riser. Shortly after five o'clock in the morning a saddled pony was brought round to the front door, and while the air was still cool, as was his daily habit in the summer, he rode for an hour.

Just as he was about to enter the gates of the house he drew rein in order to observe the behaviour of an elderly Chinese, who was in the act of painting through a stencil on the right-hand gate-post. The man was just standing back to admire his handiwork as Burnside drew abreast.

" Who gave you the right to paint signs on my gate-post ? " asked Burnside sharply.

" I do no wrong," said the man fearfully. " It is but the chop of the Society."

Laboriously, because he read Chinese with difficulty, Burnside deciphered the meaning of the stencil-mark which read: "In this house dwell benevolent persons."

"What know you of the benevolence, or otherwise, of the people who live here?"

"Unless they were benevolent," replied the man with a laugh, "you may be sure that the chop would not be on the gate-post. Not ten minutes ago the butler gave me six dollars for the Society. His master, it seems, is a mean man who grasps his riches tightly. The six dollars, therefore, came out of the butler's own purse. To me it matters not whose purse the money comes from, always so long as it is paid . . . but I cannot stay here all day gossiping like an old woman. I have many calls to make."

"This is my house, old man," said Burnside angrily, "and I do not choose to have that chop on my gate-post. It is not my habit to pay blackmail to extortioners."

"There is no need to be angry with me," said the man mildly, "for I did but repeat what the butler told me. Nevertheless, it is a good thing to have this chop on the gate-post, for while it is there no thief would dare to enter."

By now the servants had heard the altercation at the gate and came out to see what was afoot. "Who gave you the right to have signs painted on the gate-post?" snapped Burnside as the sleek butler came on the scene.

"I did it in the interests of the Master," said the butler with truth.

"Old man," called Burnside, whose ire was now thoroughly aroused, "I give you two minutes to wash that chop off the gate-post. Hurry, before the ink dries!"

"I cannot, for the butler paid. The chop is the Society's receipt. The Society would lose much face if I were to wash it off . . ."

"You will wash it off, or you will go to prison. Take your choice."

"I would rather go to prison than cause the Society to lose face," was the indifferent reply.

A moment later, using the old man's gown as a mop, two garden coolies were washing off the offending sign under Burnside's orders, while the butler had gone into the house to telephone for a policeman.

Burnside had been looking for some pretext to declare open war upon Kung. Petty as it was, this incident was a good one for the purpose, involving as it did the question of face.

Many efforts have been made to translate into everyday English the precise meaning of "face" as the term is used in China. It can mean prestige and frequently does, but it can mean so many other things. If Burnside had gone to the office wearing a dirty or badly creased white suit, his entire household staff would have lost face. So in degree would the company of which he was the head. A man loses face if he is rebuked in the presence of his own inferiors. The same is true if he happens to be worsted in a bargain, or made to appear ridiculous in any one of a thousand ways. There is hardly a situation in Chinese daily life in which face is not in some way the fulcrum point, for to lose too much face is to lose life itself. Face, too, may be gained as well as lost.

Many Westerners have inclined to the belief that the gaining or losing of face is merely a childish game and have behaved accordingly. Unless they have hurriedly revised this belief, the facts tend to show that their sojourn in China has been neither long nor pleasant. Face is no game. It might almost be described as the mainspring itself of Chinese life.

Of all these things and many more Gordon Burnside was fully aware. The washing off of the Society's chop would involve the Society in much loss of face. The treatment of its emissary as a common malefactor would be deeply resented. Kung, as the principal personage involved, would suffer a personal loss of face, for in a few hours all Shanghai would be tittering as the tale went the rounds.

If face were to be restored to Kung—and unless the Society of which he was the head were to founder, it must—then the next move would be up to Kung.

The harmless emissary of the Society appeared on the following day at the International Mixed Court on the minor charge of defacing private property. He was defended by an eminent and, therefore, highly paid lawyer, who contended that the placing of this small and highly eulogistic sign upon a private person's gate-post could not be construed as defacement within the meaning of the law. The lawyer employed by Burnside

contended that when requested by the owner of the house to remove the offending sign, the defendant should have done so. His failure to do so constituted an aggravation of the offence. That the sign was eulogistic of the owner of the premises could not be taken in mitigation, for if this were the case it would establish as a legal principle the right of every man to scribble what he pleased over the face of every other man's property, provided always that what he scribbled were sufficiently eulogistic.

The Court, fully aware that the issues involved were far deeper than the trivial charge against which the defendant was defending himself, allowed the lawyers for either side plenty of latitude. It remained for Burnside's legal adviser to say what everyone was thinking "We are occupying the time of the Court with what appears to be a trifle," he said, "although all of us are aware that the law does not concern itself with trifles. The real issue at stake is whether an organisation, calling itself a benevolent society, may be permitted under this jurisdiction to levy blackmail in the name of sweet charity. This 'chop' stencilled on the outside of premises is a declaration to all who pass by that the owner of these premises has submitted with the best grace possible to blackmail. The chop of the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society has no magic qualities. My client, Mr Burnside, is the head of a great insurance company, a large part of whose business is insuring against theft, burglary, housebreaking and pilferage. To put that chop upon his gate-post was a gross affront, for it would have declared to all the world that the only real protection against thieves was submission to extortion. For the head of a great insurance company to make such a declaration publicly would have been tantamount to an admission that insurance, as we know the word, was a failure. I realise that the maximum penalty in this case is small, but I ask the Court impose it."

The Court, after some five minutes of deliberation, found the defendant guilty and fined him one dollar.

"You've asked for trouble, my friend," said Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby to Burnside as the finding of the Court was announced, "and I don't think you'll have to wait long for it."

CHAPTER III

KUNG looked up from his desk, smiling courteously at his visitor and setting aside the work upon which he was engaged. "Detective-Sergeant Wen, is it not? What may I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"I come with a message," said the visitor, wishing someone else had been chosen as messenger. "The man Willoughby says that if by chance you should pass by the Central Police Station this morning he would be honoured and delighted if you would pay him a visit. There are grave matters he would discuss with you."

"Did he mention the nature of these grave matters?"

"He did not, but it would not surprise me if it concerned the matter of a thief taken in the night while breaking into a godown on the Yangtszepoo Road."

"How this should concern me," observed Kung, "is more than I can understand. Nevertheless, I will make it my pleasure to call at the Central Police Station at eleven o'clock exactly."

When he was left alone, Kung looked unhappy, and since there was no one to observe his facial expression, it must be presumed that it reflected his true feelings. After a little while he resumed his interrupted work, at which he remained until fifteen minutes before the time set for the appointment.

Within a few seconds of the arrival of Kung in his private office, Willoughby experienced a strange sensation, strange at least for him. Neither the illogical pride he had in his white blood, nor the great powers which his important position gave him, were able to destroy an uncomfortable sense of inferiority in the presence of this tall, aristocratic Chinese. A long time had passed since Willoughby, as a very humble police constable, had pounded the pavements of an industrial city in the North of England. A longer time had passed since, leaving

school at the age of fourteen, he had helped his mother, through widowhood and poverty, by collecting and delivering the laundry she did at home for the wealthier families in the town.

Now, surveying his visitor, who waited with grave courtesy for the nature of the interview to be disclosed, Willoughby was reminded forcibly of the feelings he had once endured while standing in cold porches awaiting the pleasure of his mother's patrons. He wished fervently that it were possible, without making himself ridiculous, to send his visitor away, for he did not like being reminded of his humble origins. Kung, whom until this moment he had never met, would not allow him to forget them.

It had been Willoughby's intention, because experience had taught him that such methods were effective, to ride roughshod over this presumptuous Chinese who was causing such a stir in the International Settlement, as well as in the Chinese city and the French Concession. But surveying Kung, he found that he could not do so.

It was not going to be easy, he knew, to survive the interview with his dignity intact.

"Do you speak English, Mr Kung?" he asked in that tongue, for he was now suddenly aware of the inadequacy of his own Chinese, which he spoke fluently enough, but not as a Chinese of the upper class.

"I speak English rarely these days," replied Kung. "If I make absurd errors I shall ask your indulgence. I learned your tongue in my youth, when my respected father represented the Empress in a humble capacity at the Court of St James."

Even in his mother tongue, Willoughby realised with dismay, he was this man's inferior. He found himself reviewing the other's reply, searching the words for some underlying insolence. Finding none made him feel a little cheap.

"A lot of people are talking about you, Mr Kung," he began, "and all they say isn't good."

"Every man who achieves a little prominence, Mr Willoughby, must expect to gather detractors as he goes. Tell me frankly what is said, without sparing my feelings, and I will try to correct any bad impressions which have been made on your mind. I will tell you, too, Mr Willoughby, that if

you had not sought me out I would have come to you, for I am sure that we can be mutually helpful."

"You want frankness, Mr Kung. You shall have it. People are saying that the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society, of which you are the head, is a cloak for much uglier things than charity."

"It does not surprise me in the least, for it is the obvious thing to say . . ."

"Last night, Mr Kung, a man was arrested while breaking into a godown on the Yangtszepoo Road. The godown did not bear the protecting chop of your Society. Furthermore, the owners of the godown tell me that your Society made a demand on them for six hundred dollars only one week ago. That demand was resisted. These things may merely be unrelated facts, or they may have a very close bearing on each other. What do you think, Mr Kung?"

"I would say, beyond argument, Mr Willoughby, that the facts are related. There can be no doubt about it. . . ."

Willoughby looked completely dumbfounded by the admission.

"I think it only fair to warn you, Mr Kung," he said, "that this conversation is being taken down in shorthand. It could —in certain—circumstances—be used against you."

"Thank you for the warning, Mr Willoughby, but I already knew this. I was told, you see, as I came into the building, that a young lady had been borrowed from a near-by office for the purpose. That is why I chose to speak English. The Chinese language does not lend itself to shorthand, and Chen, who does this work, is not, I fear, very accurate. Accuracy, you will agree, Mr Willoughby, is very important, is it not? You see, I mention these things quite deliberately, for I want to convince you that I am not the extortioner you believe me to be. Ask me any questions you like, Mr Willoughby, and to the best of my poor abilities I will answer them fully and truthfully. If at the end you would like me to sign the transcript of this talk, I shall be happy to do so. I have nothing to hide from you—nothing."

"Then," said Willoughby after a moment's thought, "I will ask you one question. Just how are you involved in last

night's attempted burglary of the godown? Or shall we say, how is your Society involved?"

"A perfectly fair question, Mr Willoughby. In answering it, remember, I have no actual knowledge that such an attempt took place, but since you tell me it is so, I will accept it as a fact. The would-be thief, whoever he may be, is probably not a Shanghai man. He would, nevertheless, be almost sure to know of my Society, for there are very few criminals within a radius of two or three hundred miles of Shanghai who do not. Being intent on thieving, he would, therefore, be wise enough not to attempt to rob premises protected by the chop of the Society, because he would know that his chances of escape were slender—pitifully slender, Mr Willoughby. Have I answered your question to your satisfaction?"

"Thank you, yes, Mr Kung, but you realise, I hope, that in doing so you have come very near making dangerous admissions."

"To you they may seem dangerous, but not to me. The truth, uttered by an honest man to an honest man, cannot be dangerous. It is against the law of Nature."

"Nevertheless, Mr Kung, you admit by implication that premises not protected by the chop of your Society are, shall we say, more likely to be robbed than those which are protected? It follows, therefore, that a demand by your Society for charitable contributions carries with it an implicit threat. It is not a very long step from that point to say that demands made by your Society are, as the law judges these matters, extortion under threats. If a court of law could be persuaded to take that view, Mr Kung, yours would not be an enviable position."

"If a court of law could be persuaded to take that view, I agree," replied Kung with a smile. "Let me put to you an analogy—an almost exact parallel. Let us suppose that you are the owner of a dog. You give this dog food, shelter and affection. You become its protector. The dog, in reward for your kindness, becomes gentle and affectionate. Then, because you are called away on a long journey, let us say, your servants forget to feed the dog. Hunger drives the poor creature to desperation. He becomes savage and dangerous. In this state

he kills and eats a pig belonging to your neighbour. In such a case, Mr Willoughby, would you consider it just if you were accused of a conspiracy to extort money from your neighbour under threat of killing his pig if he did not pay you? Would that be justice?"

"No," replied Willoughby thoughtfully, "that would not be justice."

"Then," continued Kung, "will you tell me where my position and that of the society differs in any single particular from your position as the owner of the dog?"

"There can only be one difference, Mr Kung, and at the present time I am not prepared to say that this difference exists. If it could be established that your Society, while giving its protection to those who pay its demands, offers direct encouragement to criminals to molest the property of those who do not pay, then your society becomes automatically a criminal organisation."

"If this were true, your interpretation is the correct one, Mr Willoughby. But it is not true. Furthermore, I resent very strongly the use of the word 'demands' in this connection. The Society makes demands on nobody. Every person or company is assessed—arbitrarily, I will agree—in accordance with his or its apparent wealth. The Society intimates to the person or company concerned that for the amount of this assessment it will place the premises under its protection, but there is never any threat, or any demand. If at any time you can establish that any person has made threats in the name of the Society, I will appear to aid in his prosecution. Our good name, you must understand, is all we have, and it must be not jeopardised."

Willoughby wished with all his heart that he had not sought this interview, for it shattered his complacency, destroying conceptions which had assumed in his mind the stature of self-evident truths.

When Kung had first come into prominence, Willoughby had been inclined to believe—he had hinted as much to Burnside—that the Society was an innocent one. Latterly, because of the innate scepticism which is part of the make-up of a good policeman, and because also of a stream of complaints from

frightened and indignant merchants, he had reversed his original judgment and—until a few minutes previously—had been convinced of the Society's criminality. Now Willoughby was less sure and his doubts distressed him. It was disconcerting, too, to know that someone in the Central Police Station had tipped off Kung that a shorthand note was to be taken of all he said. Most disconcerting of all, however, was Kung's easy and unconcerned manner and his apparent frankness.

Willoughby the policeman was arguing that many of the most dangerous crooks have charming and disarming personalities. Willoughby the man, however, could not bring himself to believe that this was mere surface charm, hiding the corruption beneath. "I would like," he said after a long silence, "to visit this famous house by the river and to see for myself what goes on there."

"Even if I wished to do so, Mr Willoughby, I could not prevent you from coming. It was on the tip of my tongue to invite you for a stated day and hour, but I will not do so. Then it cannot be said that the scene was specially prepared for you. Come at any hour of the day or night and without warning. Come as Chief Detective-Inspector if you will, but, better still, come—as a friend. I warn you, Mr Willoughby, as you warned me, that I will spare no pains to convince you of my sincerity, for I need you as an ally."

They parted cordially. For Willoughby it was a new experience. He had never before called a man in for questioning, which in effect was what he had done to Kung, to be made to feel that he had done a presumptuous and unwarrantable thing. There lingered, nevertheless, the remnants of suspicion—the suspicion of a policeman whose experience had taught him that things are seldom quite as they seem and that very few men, given the opportunity to exploit a situation to their own advantage, failed to do so.

It lay within Kung's power to levy immense, almost incalculable, sums on this rich, teeming city of Shanghai, for it stood to reason that the man who could turn criminals, even if only temporarily, into law-abiding citizens, could just as easily contrive that they should revert to their bad old ways. Was any man so fundamentally right in his attitude to life that such

power was safe in his hands? Willoughby doubted this. He did not believe that the entire façade was a sham and that Kung was in reality an arch-criminal, but he could not help believing that the possibility of this being so could not be ruled out. Whispers had already reached his ears of Kung's infatuation for the little singer, acclaimed by the multitude as Pearl of the Morning. This Willoughby recognised as a chink in Kung's façade, for if the man were the aristocrat he pretended to be, this mercenary little slut must surely offend him rather than attract him. They could have nothing in common, these two, even granted that the lightning of infatuation strikes in some very queer places.

Before going to his lunch Willoughby had an appointment at an office on The Bund. Just as the rickshaw was depositing him before the building his attention was attracted by great gusts of laughter coming from a group of Chinese idling on the pavement in front of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank. The laughter seemed to be directed at a European who was coming towards him. Willoughby waited a few seconds, noting that the cause of all this mirth was Gordon Burnside, who, blazing with anger and wearing a puzzled expression, strode past. Neatly painted in huge black Chinese characters on the centre of his white duck jacket was the chop of the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society.

Willoughby's first impulse was to call Burnside back and tell him the cause of the laughter, but he resisted the impulse. This, quite obviously, was Kung's method of regaining the face which had been lost by the judgment of the International Mixed Court. Burnside, Willoughby mused, should be thankful that such a very harmless way of doing so had been found. If the tough-fibred Scot would take this light-hearted hint as the jest it was, it might be well for him. But even as he turned this over in his mind Willoughby knew that he would not. Such a jest would mortally affront Burnside, whose actuarial mind would see it against the orderly pattern of his own life as a wanton piece of buffoonery.

Willoughby pulled himself hastily out of this reverie, realising with shocked surprise as he did so, that his private sympathies in this matter were not with Burnside. He had not the right

to private sympathies. He was a policeman. As such facts, and only facts, must sway his judgments. As a policeman, too, he must keep before him all the time that this Kung, however righteous he might be, was usurping the functions of the police and setting the processes of law to defiance. That he was apparently a model of rectitude, imbued with great charm, meant nothing. Kung was not an immortal. Even supposing that he were all that he seemed to be, having the moral ballast to control the organisation of which he was the head without misusing it, there was no guarantee that those who came after him would be so high-minded and apparently altruistic.

The Burnsides of this world had proved their utility to organised society. Their integrity was generally accepted. The great financial structures they had created were their own monument. Could this huge, tired, decayed, sprawling civilisation of China offer anything comparable? Was there, Willoughby asked himself, one single aspect of Chinese life which was not honeycombed with corruption? The very processes of government itself were bogged down in a mire of place-seeking, nepotism, ineptness and wholesale thievery. The tax-gatherer was little more than a vehicle through whom public funds were diverted into private pockets. The whole rotten structure—the Empire recently become a Republic—was falling to pieces and the kind of devious methods, employed by men like Kung, were to a large extent responsible.

I am an Englishman, Willoughby reminded himself, and it is because China is like this that I am holding my present position. This International Settlement relies upon me to protect it from the decadent philosophy of men like Kung, whose tortuous thinking has brought China to its present state. If I allow Kung to usurp the functions of the police, by making the police in large measure unnecessary, I shall be allowing my job to founder under my feet. But, he paused to ask himself, would not a world in which there was no need for police approach somewhere near to Utopia? Crime was a symptom, not a disease. Crime was the rash on a diseased society. The remedy lay with society, not with the criminals. That, it would seem, was what Kung was trying to achieve by levying toll on society in order to remove temptation from potential criminals.

Here Willoughby knew himself to be on firm ground. The world was full of potential criminals, but there was no such thing as a criminal class.

This inner conflict was brought to an end by the recollection that the day was Thursday, which at Shepherd's Restaurant was steak-and-kidney-pudding-day. There was nothing, he knew from long experience, better calculated to kill abstract adventures than a good steak-and-kidney pudding. It was the rice-eating peoples who dealt in phantasies.

* * * * *

The numbers sheltering at the house by the river were now grown to more than three thousand. More arrived each night. Already there was overcrowding. Soon it would be necessary to turn men away. If that day came, then to a large extent the work of the Society would be stultified, for had it not been proclaimed far and wide that here was refuge for the unfortunate? In such a matter the Society could not go back on its word, if only because a man with an empty belly cannot wait to fill it.

The petty case at the International Mixed Court had caused the Society to lose much face and in losing face to lose at the same time financial support on which it had been counting. Public opinion is an unpredictable thing. Many people, while believing that Burnside had been foolish to press the matter to its conclusion, also believed that moral justification was on his side. The Chinese, almost always ready to compromise themselves, have nevertheless a sneaking admiration for those who will not. The people in general were not sure, but they suspected, that the placing of the chop on Burnside's gate-post without his knowledge or consent had been done deliberately. It might have passed unnoticed by him but for the accident of arriving at the precise moment when the man was at work. He was the head of a great insurance company. For him to have on his premises the chop which indicated that he had paid tribute to the Society would have been a tacit admission of lack of faith in insurance as a protection from thieves.

More than all this, although in their history they have sub-

mitted to much, the Chinese rebel instinctively against coercion. With Burnside's example to encourage them, hundreds of wealthy merchants, and tens of thousands of householders, shook their heads at the Society's representative and hoped as they did so that they were being wise.

In the meanwhile, of the considerable sums already collected, most had been spent. Without any publicity, Kung had acquired a large tract of agricultural land on the shores of Lake Ta Hu, which lies between Soochow and Hangchow. It was sour, poor land, but if well drained could again become fertile and productive. Here, if all went well, Kung planned to provide a new chance of life for the unfortunates who passed through the house by the river, where six thousand rice-bowls had to be filled every day. Money, money in large sums, was required if the work were to go on. Money would come quickly enough if public confidence were restored.

Just at this time there occurred, on the Pootung side of the Whangpoo River, a serious fire which destroyed a large part of a tobacco factory employing some thousands of men and women, who were thrown out of work. Kung, who watched the fire from his own quarters, realised with a sinking heart that the Society to which he had devoted his life and talents would, within a very few days, face the supreme crisis of its existence. Even when fully employed, the poverty of the tobacco workers was pitiable. Now their condition would become desperate.

There were, as Kung well knew, plenty of charitably-inclined men in Shanghai who believed in him. They, if acquainted with the facts of the Society's predicament, would dig once more into their pockets to aid him. But he dared not ask, for to ask would be to admit the weakness of his position and to invite the onslaughts of enemies.

Only one of the great insurance companies, that of which Cleghorn was the head, had agreed to contribute any substantial sum. Kung had not approached anyone except Burnside and Cleghorn, hoping that others would approach him, especially when they saw how Cleghorn had benefited.

Provided there were no increase in the number of dependents, Kung calculated that the Society's funds would last for a little

less than three months by the exercise of every possible economy. There was no time to waste.

* * * * *

The River Police launch plugged steadily upstream against the heavy swirling tide and in a little while was lost to view in the light mist which hung low over the Whangpoo and the mud-flats on either side. When the beat of the engine was no longer audible to the watchers on shore, a large *sampan* put out from the Pootung side of the river. Four men, two on each oar, thrust the craft swiftly through the water in the direction of the wharves which lined the left bank on the Shanghai side, below Hongkew. The rowers steered for a buoy which lay some two miles downstream, vacated that day by an outward-bound steamer. Making the *sampan* fast, the rowers joined a score of other men crouched below the level of the gunwales. It was long past midnight. Nothing stirred on the river.

The tide lapping at the buoy, the ringing of a distant ship's bell and the coughing from the anchor watch of a large liner on the far side, were the only sounds to be heard by those who waited, straining their ears in the direction of an immense godown which reared its bulk in silhouette against a faintly starlit sky. The mist was clearing.

On the landward side of the godown, in an alley leading from the Yangtszepoo Road, the region of vast cotton mills and other factories, four men crouched in the shadows outside high steel gates surmounted by barbed wire. Inside the gates an armed guard, his hand on the butt of a revolver, as though ready to draw it instantly, sat smoking a cigarette on the top of an upturned barrel. In a little while two of the watchmen who patrolled the wharves came to join him, helping to while away the tedium of the night. Then from down the alley outside there came the sound of the plop-plop of a rickshaw coolie's bare feet. The watchmen, who were supposed to be on the river side of the godown, disappeared hastily. From the rickshaw descended a slender clerkly Chinese, the assistant manager of the godown, recently promoted. He would not be displeased to find slackness on the part of the watchmen,

for as soon as there were a pretext for dismissing one, he wanted the position for his wife's uncle, who had a large appetite and contributed nothing towards the expenses of the household.

The armed guard, who had already recognised him, made a show of great diligence, forcing him to identify himself before he would unlock the gates.

The over-zealous assistant manager would have been better in his bed that night, for at the very instant the gates opened, a sandbag, little larger than a large orange, struck him under the right ear. A split second later a heavy wooden club cracked the skull of the armed guard like the proverbial eggshell. The rickshaw coolie looked up just in time to see a sausage-like sandbag descending upon his own head.

There was no noise. The thing was very well done. The body of the armed guard was hauled into the shadows. The rickshaw coolie, riding for the first time in the passenger's seat, was pulled through the gates, which were carefully locked after him.

Gently, for he was highly important, the assistant manager was carried inside After a few seconds he groaned. Some cold water thrown in his face caused him to open his eyes, remembering as he did so that this was one more score to be chalked up against his wife's uncle. As his muddled mind began to function again with some clarity, he realised that the message which had brought him down at this hour of the night must have been inspired by the robbers, one of whom began methodically slapping his face. By this time he was inside the godown, being propelled in the direction of the strong-room, the keys to which hung from a chain under his gown. Managing to detach these from the chain, he had the presence of mind to throw them on to a pile of old sacks. Five minutes later, suspended by his thumbs from a beam, he was wishing he had not been so faithful to his duty. The lighted cigarette which had been dropped into his shoe hurt abominably.

"The keys! The keys! The keys!"

"I threw them on to a pile of sacks," he managed to gasp. He should have been more explicit, for in the godown were

many piles of sacks, and while they searched they left him suspended by his thumbs, omitting also to do anything about the lighted cigarette.

When they cut him down there were about a score of men in the godown. One of them was wiping blood from a knife. They looked a fierce crew, more wolves than men. Yet, only a bare two weeks previously, they had been employed peaceably enough in a tobacco factory for twelve hours out of twenty-four. For the greater part of the other twelve they had been too exhausted to do anything but sleep.

The strong-room was a massive affair of steel and concrete, behind which were five bales of costly Siberian furs in transit to San Francisco, to say nothing of four gold bars and a little wooden box, bound with steel hoops, containing platinum coins. These last had been currency in Siberia not long since, when the value of platinum was roughly that of silver.

When all these had been carried out of the strong room on to the wharf, the assistant manager was next pushed into the main office, where they made him open a small safe. There was nothing here but old account books and a few postage stamps.

The man who appeared to be the leader of the gang signed to one of the others. The gesture said, as plainly as words: This man is of no further value. The assistant manager, therefore, was thrown into the corner of the room where, huddled together fearfully, were the rickshaw coolie who had brought him and five watchmen.

These unhappy seven knew, without being told, that they had only a few minutes to live. They could not be allowed to live, having seen the faces of the robbers. In the few minutes which remained, therefore, they wasted none on vain hopes, unless it were that the end would be merciful.

The deed was done on the wharf. It was hard on the assistant manager that he was the last. He had to watch while the throats of the other six were slit from ear to ear. His last conscious thought was to wonder whether he, too, would make the strange gurgling noises which had been the swan-song of the others.

The robbers who had arrived by water left by water, taking

the plunder with them to the Pootung side of the river. The four who had come by land left by the main gate on which, in the dead centre and neatly stencilled, was the chop of the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society. The owners of the godown, an Anglo-Chinese concern, had been benevolent to the tune of two thousand dollars.

To show his contempt, the leader of the four spat accurately at the chop. "If I had seen that," said one of the others, a man named Ling, "I would have had no part in this night's work."

Ling did not know, but he was nearer death at that moment than he had ever been. He had made an admission of weakness. Happily for him—happily, if he wished to live a few weeks longer—a party of sanitary men entered the alley. It would have been easy to kill them, too, but the zest for killing had spent itself. But by one of those chances which, if the moralists are right, Providence ensures that the way of the transgressor be a hard one, Ling was briefly recognised. Harder still, he was recognised by a man whom he had once tricked of a few coppers.

Leaving aside altogether any moral considerations, the decision to murder possible witnesses, thus stilling their tongues for ever, was not so prudent as it seems, for it left out of calculation the sobering fact that wanton and needless slaying arouses great fear, wrath and indignation in vast numbers of people who would not ordinarily be greatly stirred by common robbery. In the mind of a citizen it is a disturbing thought that there are abroad persons so callous that the snuffing-out of a few human lives means no more than the lighting of a cigarette.

To outrage the public conscience has always been to set in motion forces incalculably great. History bristles with examples of this truth.

When the work-people arrived at the godown at seven o'clock in the morning, to find seven men lying on the wharf with their throats cut and another at the rear with his brains spilling down his clothing, the alarm was given. Within a few minutes there arrived upon the scene Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby and two car-loads of helpers. Not long after this came a Scot, reporter for one of the afternoon papers, whose stomach

was not very strong. When he had recovered from the fit of retching which assailed him, he turned to Willoughby and asked what he thought of the matter. "You may quote me if you like," was the reply, "as saying that the police suspect foul play." But there was little else of humour in this shocking affair.

As in the case of the robbers, Willoughby did not notice the chop of the Society upon the gate until he was leaving. The sight of it, with an ugly rivulet of spittle which had run down the gate, caused him to change his plans.

Thus it happened that Willoughby brought the news of the robbery and murders to the house by the river. To Kung, who contrived not to allow his face to reveal any of his feelings, the news was little short of a catastrophe. It seemed, as he digested its import, that it was a blow from which the prestige of the Society might never recover.

"These men have got to be caught and punished, Mr Kung," said Willoughby. "What can you do to help? I wouldn't be surprised if it's just as important to you as it is to the police. More so, maybe, because"—he watched Kung narrowly while he made the thrust—"the police work goes on, whether it succeeds or fails and . . ."

"I could finish the sentence for you, Mr Willoughby, but it is not necessary."

"I have fifty men assigned to the job, Mr Kung. I am here to find out if you can help in any way, and, if so, how."

"I will have more than three thousand men out before the day is done, Mr Willoughby, three thousand unfortunate men who know that if they fail they will experience again the ache of empty bellies. Give me in the meanwhile a few facts, some trail to follow."

"There aren't any facts—unless you can call eight corpses facts. The throats were all slit by the same man, who, according to the doctors, must have been very short. There were probably at least a dozen men taking part in the robbery, for we found forty-two cigarette ends littered on the floor of the main office and in front of the strong-room. They were, therefore, heavy smokers, for the premises had been swept clean last evening. But one must not give this too much significance,

for men such as these would have been tense and highly strung. They would have smoked furiously to steady their nerves. One thing remains to be explained: the presence in the middle of the night of the assistant manager, a man named Ting-li. His wife says that he was warned that one of the watchmen was unreliable, but we are inclined to believe that he was an accomplice . . ."

"Give me a few hours, Mr Willoughby, and I will be able to tell you more about this Ting-li than, perhaps, he knew himself. Soon, I promise you, there will be no lack of facts. The difficulty will be to appraise them, rejecting those which are useless. Hunger and the threat of hunger give men sharp eyes and ears."

This mild man Kung, as soon as Willoughby had left, underwent an amazing transformation, falling into one of the cold rages under the influence of which the Chinese widen the gulf already existing between East and West. This rage opened up untapped, or long latent, reservoirs of energy and resource; it made Kung forget the need for food and rest. He became wound up like some tightly-coiled spring, remaining utterly, frighteningly calm under the tension which, if it were allowed to continue for too long, would consume him.

"Before the noonday rice is served," he told the three young men, who were his trusted lieutenants, "I want all the people gathered in the eating-hall. Tell the cooks that from now and until I countermand the order, the rice-bowls will be only half filled."

"There will be great discontent," said one of the young men anxiously.

"There *is* great discontent," retorted Kung. "A great shame has been put upon us all. Half-filled rice-bowls will prove an ever-present reminder. Also, do not forget, it enables us to effect a great economy, without revealing to others our need. Call me when all are assembled."

When Kung came through the door at the end of the great hall, nearly three thousand faces were upturned towards him. Most of those present guessed that what he had to say concerned the robbery. In concise terms he recapitulated the events of the night as far as he knew them, but the tale failed to stir his

hearers. "Because of this shameful thing," he told them, "I have lost much face. So also has this honourable Society and every person in this hall. But it is not only face which is lost. Unless these guilty men are found and punished, we shall have lost for ever the goodwill of Shanghai's benevolent persons, for the godown was protected by our chop. The police, doubtless, will do all they can, for they, too, have lost face. But the police are few and we are many.

"When the rice is served in a little while, and until the guilty are found and the stolen goods restored to their owners, the rice-bowls here will be half filled. While this shame lies upon us all, we have no right to full bellies"

Kung surveyed them, noting with satisfaction the fear he had kindled in their hearts. With the fear of hunger to spur them, they would waste no time.

"Go out into the byways of the city," he told them, "questioning everyone you meet. I want news of a short man of the brutish sort. He will have been absent from his home last night for some hours and he will have tried to cleanse or get rid of clothes soaked in blood. This thing was done by a dozen, or perhaps more, desperate men. It could not have been long planned, remember, for it was not known until yesterday that these rich furs and precious metals would be in the godown.

"All these men, it seems, smoked heavily. All smoked the same brand of cigarette which, when you consider the matter, is a strange thing. Brothers have been known to smoke different brands. Would it be possible, think you"—he spoke slowly and with great emphasis—"that all these men smoked the same brand of cigarettes because, for some reason, they were able to purchase that brand more cheaply? Or, being robbers, is it not possible that the cigarettes were stolen?"

"The name of the brand?" called a dozen voices.

"The brand is a new one, not very well known," said Kung. "It is called Lotus Bud. Go out when you have eaten. There will be many eager to talk. Listen to all. Bring back all that you hear. I will find the means to sift the fact from the fancy. There will be, doubtless, large rewards. To these I will add ten thousand dollars. This sum I will pay if *just one* of the

guilty men is brought to *me*. Ten thousand dollars for just one guilty man. It is a great sum. Now hurry. For me and my household, as for you, the rice-bowls will remain half filled until the thing is done."

The half portions of food were eaten hastily and in sombre silence. In a little while those who had listened to Kung went out into the city in small groups.

"Go to Lok the fur merchant," Kung told one of the three young men, "and when you have conveyed my compliments, ask him for a list of any dishonest fur merchants in the city, or in all North China, who would be able to dispose of rich Siberian sables. There cannot be many, for these furs are, like gems, easily identifiable, and only a dishonest man would buy them now."

To the second young man he allotted the next mission. "Get me the names of all bullion dealers in the city capable of smelting platinum, and all those who deal or have dealt in platinum. Set a score of men to watch each of them—day and night."

Kung was now left with the third young man, who was his nephew, being his brother's child. "In our hands," he said solemnly, "rests the honour of the name of Kung, perhaps the most honourable name in all China, even though as I utter the words I know that the natural modesty of our illustrious ancestor who made the name great would have forbidden such a boastful claim. Nevertheless, it is for us to see that it is not tarnished."

"What rôle have you allotted to me, respected uncle?"

"Gather round you to-day a dozen, or a score, of young men of intelligence. With them to help, listen to all the rumours and the whispers and the slanders and the lies which will be brought here before nightfall. Sift them with a fine sieve. The lies will be recognised easily, for they will fall into a pattern, as men seeking to ingratiate themselves will try to foist off rumour as fact."

CHAPTER IV

CHIEF DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR WILLOUGHBY was a very harassed man. The robbery of the godown on the Yangtszepoo Road and the accompanying murders had been the prelude to a wave of the kind of crime from which Shanghai had been for many months remarkably free. Fortunately for him, he was not over sensitive. Otherwise, it might have been hard to endure the verbal arrows which the press—vernacular and English—hurled at him and at the police as a whole. Letters to the editor appeared, asking in exaggerated rhetoric, why the householder paid taxes if no better protection could be given. Every kind of robbery was rampant, from armed hold-ups and wholesale lootings to petty burglaries.

There was, probably, Willoughby reflected grimly, no more difficult city on earth to police than Shanghai, filled as it was with the sweepings of China and the polyglot riff-raff of the world at large. But these difficulties were overlooked when apportioning blame.

No efforts had been spared to run to earth the gang which had been responsible for starting the crime wave, but the task presented formidable difficulties. There had been a round-up of habitual criminals, but it was evident from the start that this was an empty gesture. If habitual criminals had been involved there must have been a whisper from the scores of professional informers who passed on crumbs of information to the police. But from these there was silence.

The finger-print department had already been working for a week, trying to identify the thousands of prints found on the godown premises with the work-people ordinarily employed there, on the assumption that prints not thus identified would probably be those of the robbers. If this were so—and it seemed likely—not one of the prints unaccounted for had ever been in

the hands of the police. This in its turn suggested desperate men who had turned their attention to crime for the first time. How, was the great question, did men of this character, who would be unlikely to know receivers of stolen goods, hope to dispose of their valuable loot? It was a reasonable deduction, that behind the robbers stood some person with a façade of respectability who, in Shanghai or elsewhere, might hope to dispose of such difficult things as sables, gold bars and platinum.

In the absence of clues, Willoughby had fallen back on routine enquiry, always—despite romantic fiction—more prolific of results than flashes of genius. The police in such widely-separated parts of the world as Hongkong, Manila, San Francisco, Vancouver, Sydney, Singapore, and India, had been notified, and it would not be long before the European police were likewise warned. Passengers leaving Shanghai by train and by ship—overseas, riverine and coastwise—were being scrutinised and, in cases of suspicion, their baggage searched. The results of a month of intensive work were purely negative.

Endeavours to link the murdered assistant manager of the godown with the robbers had failed. He, it seemed, was a young man of high integrity, for whom three respectable merchants had been guarantors in a large sum. His father bore an impeccable character.

Willoughby was vaguely aware that Kung, using somewhat different methods, was covering the same ground, for detectives brought in tales of large numbers of men scouring Shanghai for the least detail. The Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society was, as everyone knew, fighting for its very existence. Its chop, once so potent a deterrent, had lost its magic, for more than a dozen premises, protected thus, had been entered and robbed.

Gordon Burnside, to Willoughby's great astonishment, took the situation philosophically. "I'd rather pay a few claims," he said, "than submit to Kung's extortion. If claims continue to mount, we shall raise our rates. These things happen and—well, we're prepared for them."

* * * * *

In an evil-smelling rookery of Chapei, at the end of a night of even less fragrant toil, spent in emptying night-soil pails

into a cart, which most of Shanghai still used in default of sewers, a man named Sam-wo licked his lips with a mixture of greed and fear. With difficulty, for he was barely literate and troubled with weak eyes, he scanned a newspaper which he had picked up on the night's rounds. It was two days old.

Sam-wo became almost dizzy as he read of the huge rewards which would be paid for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the robbers who had touched off this wave of crime. In bold black letters was the offer of ten thousand dollars by the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society for just one of the men concerned. Ten thousand dollars for one man! Such a sum, Sam-wo mused, would end for ever this life of stinking toil, which caused him to be shunned by all decent people. With such a sum he could buy back the family farm which had been sold for a pittance in the year of the Great Famine. From the house in which he had been born he could look out over the acres which had nurtured seven generations of his forbears, whose graves by now had probably been ploughed over by the new owner. There were so many wonderful vistas opened up by the possession of such a vast sum that Sam-wo, who for years now had never possessed more than a few pieces of small silver at one time, fell into a day-dream in contemplating them. Not the least of these splendid visions was that of a full belly—every day.

For a little while greed and fear fought for mastery. The former won the struggle, for Sam-wo had reached that unhappy moment in life which causes men to do desperate things; any change in his circumstances, he argued to himself, must be for the better—even death itself. Men who have lived as he had lived do not find the thought of death so very terrible.

The decision made, Sam-wo fumbled in a cloth round his waist for the small silver which he possessed. It was enough to provide him with a generous bowl of rice, some coarse fish and a little rice wine, this last a luxury he had not tasted for years.

The meal helped to harden his determination, helped him, too, to set about things with a certain circumspection. These fine offers of rewards were one thing, but nobody knew better than he that there would always be grasping men standing

between a poor humble man and the payment of rewards. If he were to circumvent these, he must walk warily. Also he must not allow himself to forget, there were dangers in the rôle of informer. Nobody liked an informer, not even the police, nor those who paid rewards.

Furthermore, to men who had already slit seven throats, one more throat would be no great matter. For choice Sam-wo did not want his to be that one. The processes of his mind, never distinguished for their clarity, became even more muddled than usual. Life for a long while, having been only filth and poverty, had not been very attractive. This had made him reckless of life, willing to risk the fate of the informer. On the other hand, by an argument which might stand the test of logic, the prospect of rich rewards, to gain which might prove perilous, had suddenly made life worth preserving and himself more cautious.

Everyone in Shanghai knew that in the house by the river was food and shelter for the unfortunate, so it was here that Sam-wo directed his footsteps, hoping by spending a few days on the spot to sense the currents of the place. He arrived there just before the evening rice was served and in time to join the hungry throng which had been out all day seeking crumbs of information.

"I wonder," he asked provocatively of those nearest him at table, "what chance poor men such as ourselves would have of collecting this fine reward, even if any one of us were to know anything?"

"This Kung," said one of them, "is clever, but it is said of him that he never forgets a promise—or a threat. If I knew one of the guilty men I would seek out Kung, disclosing the inwardness of the matter to him alone. But, it would seem, the robbers have been too clever."

"Dishonest men," observed Sam-wo virtuously, "always come to a bad end. Someone—be sure of it—will betray them."

Suddenly, remembering what he knew, Sam-wo was seized by panic. If someone were to forestall him, then all these dreams he was weaving around possession of the reward would come to nothing and he himself would spend the remainder of his miserable days among the horrid stenches of his calling.

A great fear gripped his heart. Opportunity—the kind that does not come twice to a poor man—was slipping away. Every moment of delay was dangerous.

Even as these thoughts were turning over in his mind, the little silver bell tinkled and Kung himself came through the door at the end of the hall. "If any of you should suspect one small thing," he said wearily, "do not fear to bring it to the table where the young men work. Lies are not wanted and are soon detected . . . not only is there a rich reward, but there is protection for him who earns it."

This decided Sam-wo: he had heard from the lips of Kung himself that not only would the reward be paid, but that there would be protection. Slipping away from his companions at table, he joined a line of some twenty men who waited to go into another room where, for twenty-four hours in every day, patient young men listened to the tales brought to them.

"What have you to tell me?" asked a young man courteously when it came to Sam-wo's turn.

"What I have to say," was the reply, "is for the ears of the respected Kung alone."

"You may speak freely to me, for I am his nephew."

"Nevertheless, I will speak only to the respected Kung."

Kung's nephew saw that the man was in great fear, the whites of his eyes visible all round the irises. He did not want to trouble his uncle, who was near to exhaustion, but the fear he saw made him believe that this would-be informer knew something. "Wait!" he said softly. "I will take you to my uncle. Tell him, without fear, all you know."

Kung was asleep at his desk, his head pillowed on his arms, when Sam-wo was brought to him. He gagged at the stench of the man's clothing, concealing his disgust by a great effort.

Signing to his nephew to leave them alone, Kung bade Sam-wo be seated. "You have news for me, I am told. News which will lead us to the robbers. What is this news?"

"Before I tell it I want from your own lips the promise of the reward."

"If what you have to tell me is true and leads to even one of the robbers, the reward of ten thousand dollars will be yours," said Kung, using a formula he had used many times already.

" Swear this by something you hold sacred ! "

" I swear it," said Kung, " by the most sacred and binding oath of which I am capable, by the bones of my honourable ancestor, the Great Sage Kung-fu-tsze himself. Such an oath no man would dare to break."

A great sigh escaped Sam-wo, for he knew now that the reward was within reach. The sigh echoed eerily in every corner of the room.

" I am a very humble man," he began, anxious now to get the story off his chest. " I collect the nightsoil pails in the Yangtszepoo Road, near to the godown where the robbery was committed."

" An honourable if not fragrant occupation," said Kung gravely.

" Well into the night when the robbery was committed I and three others came with the cart to the alley which leads to the godown. . . ."

" The hour ? "

" Of that I cannot be exactly sure, except that I know it was after midnight. A little while before—perhaps a half hour—I saw a Sikh policeman on a bicycle. There was a Chinese policeman standing in a doorway and the Sikh, as he passed, asked the hour. In reply the former said that it was a minute or so after midnight. As we went down the alley I saw four men come out of the iron gates of the godown. They locked the gate as they left."

" Did your companions see them also ? "

" It may well be that they did. But I have not asked them."

" It is strange that you alone should see these men . . ."

" I do not say that I alone saw them. But it could be that I alone had cause to remember, for I recognised one of the men. . . ."

" Tell me all you know about the man," said Kung, striving to suppress his eagerness.

" His name is Ling," said Sam-wo, dropping his voice to a whisper. " It was three years, perhaps a little more, since I had last seen him. Nevertheless, I am sure it was he. His face is badly marked by the smallpox."

" Where does he live ? "

"That I do not know, but three years ago he lodged with a leather-worker named King in the North Szechuan Road. I do not remember the number, but I could lead you to it. He left the lodgings when he married a woman from the Pootung side."

Kung's eyes gleamed. Here was the first link, however slender, with the Pootung side of the river. "How did he live, this Ling?"

"He worked for a while in the tobacco factory—until he was dismissed. He was always a thief. That is all I know of him except that I heard he was in trouble with the police. . . ."

"Ah! He went to prison?"

"So I was told. . . ."

"Then you know others who knew this Ling. The names of these others?"

And so it went on for an hour or more until every nook and cranny in Sam-wo's mind had been searched. "It is better," said Kung when the questioning was over, "that you remain here hidden in a safe place. Only thus can we protect you."

They took Sam-wo that evening to point out the house where he and Ling had lodged, afterwards returning him to the house by the river, where, in a locked room, he slept softly to dream dreams of riches and splendour.

"It is now necessary," said Kung to the three young men, "to continue the questioning as before, as though we had learned nothing. The police must not get this Ling. He belongs to me. Choose a few trusted men and hunt him down as you would a wild beast. The informer speaks the truth. It may be that this Ling's presence was innocent. If it is so, he will have the chance to speak."

Less than an hour later a clerk in the Central Police Station, paid by Kung for odds and ends of information, was copying from a card index all that was known of a man named Ling, formerly an employee of a tobacco factory at Pootung and later in the warehouse of the same company on the Shanghai side, convicted of the theft of two thousand cigarettes and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. From another file was abstracted a complete set of finger-prints and a photograph.

Before the night was over the net had been spread far and

wide. A dozen men who had known Ling had been found, but none who had seen him in the last few months.

By morning whispers had reached the police that a man named Ling was sought and every available man was put to the task. There were many Lings on the police files, which complicated the search, no less than the fact that the police did not know with any certainty why they were looking for Ling.

Within twenty-four hours the circle of those who knew of the hunt for Ling had widened.

"Secrecy will no longer serve us," said Kung. "Let us now be discreetly indiscreet. Since no one has come forward to betray this Ling's whereabouts, we may be sure that none knows where he hides. Speed is necessary, for it is bound to come to the ears of his accomplices that Ling is sought. When they know that—provided always that he is the guilty man—they will seek to kill him in order to seal his mouth. This Ling, therefore, will be beset by twin fears as soon as he knows that he is sought. See to it that it is known everywhere that a man named Ling is sought in connection with the robbery. There are many Lings, but there will be but one with a guilty conscience. He may seek to fly from Shanghai and—because of his panic—will commit some indiscretion."

When he was quite alone Kung sat for several minutes with half-closed eyes, trying, from the mosaic of unrelated facts about Ling, to reconstruct him. He believed implicitly that human behaviour in given circumstances was a matter of pattern and that individuals seldom, if ever, strayed from their ordained patterns. An image began to take shape in Kung's mind. It was the image of a bold man, if unscrupulous, a man who made his decisions quickly and abided by them. He must perforce be a man of blunted intelligence, for he had held well-paid positions and had lost them through dishonesty, mostly of the petty kind. Unless dead already, he must be relying on something for immunity from participation in the crime. Relying on what? That he was known by his associates under an assumed name? That was not likely, for unless they knew him, such desperate men would not trust him. Perhaps he had already fled? That, too, was unlikely, for in China a man away from his own people and dialect is a marked man.

Sam-wo, when questioned by Kung as to Ling's habits, pleasure and amusements, knew only of one: Ling was a confirmed addict of the cinema, spending an evening before the flickering screen whenever he had the chance. "He would go to the same play twice or three times," Sam-wo had said, "and when he returned to the lodgings he would wake up in the night laughing. Tears he would not go to see."

The pattern of Ling's behaviour was beginning to show itself, for what safer place was there for a hunted man than in the body of a laughing crowd at a cinema theatre? Ling was a bold man, and this—because it would take his mind off other things—was a risk he would take.

An hour later Kung had ascertained by the telephone that in the three cities—the International Settlement, the French Concession and the Chinese City—in all seven theatres were showing comedies that night as the main attraction. The most popular and by general consent the funniest was Charles Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms*.

Kung had many friends in many places. By evening he had made arrangements for picked men to be in each of the seven theatres showing comedies. He had also arranged with the management of each that at a certain time during each performance a specially-prepared lantern slide would be projected on to the screen. In company with four trusted men, Kung himself went to the theatre showing *Shoulder Arms*, arranging with the management to be secreted in the wings at the side of the screen where he could see the faces of the spectators without being visible to them.

It was a wearisome vigil for Kung, not even relieved by being able to see the screen and enjoy the grotesque farce which flitted across it. All he heard were the gusts of laughter and the laboured explanations of some of the more obscure jokes given by loud-voiced announcers.

At the end of a reel there was a brief interval, and, a moment or so before the lights were switched on, a slide was projected on to the screen reading: "A person named Ling is requested to present himself at the office where an important message from Pootung awaits him." Then, instantly, while an announcer was calling out the same words for the benefit of the illiterate, every light in the theatre was switched on.

"You are requested to keep your seats," the announcer called, "as the picture will be continued at once."

One man only in the theatre rose to his feet, and then, after a moment of indecision, sat down again When the lights were dimmed again he rose and walked quickly up the aisle and towards a side exit.

If this were Ling, Kung exulted, he had proved himself not very intelligent. If he had stopped to think, he must have known that the chances of a message coming for him in such a manner and such a place were negligible. But "Ling" and "Pootung" would prove potent reminders to a guilty conscience.

By the time Kung reached the front of the theatre only one of his men was there. The hunt was on. "It is he, I think," whispered Kung's man. "His face was pockmarked and he is in a great hurry. He cannot escape now."

"I will return home to await your news," said Kung. "I will try to sleep until I hear something from you. Follow the others and see to it that this Ling be given a little time. He may lead us to some others."

The man who left the theatre so hurriedly was followed until he went into a lodging-house near the Shanghai North Station. It was a good place for a fugitive to hide, because one entrance opened into Chapei, where the International Police had no jurisdiction, and another into the International Settlement, where the Chinese Police had none. So, depending upon which police sought him, a fugitive could choose his exit.

Within fifteen minutes of the man entering the lodging-house a rat could not have escaped the cordon thrown around it. A little silver changed hands in the vestibule and four men went upstairs to the cubicle occupied by the man they thought was Ling. "Let there be no disturbance," begged the keeper of the lodging-house.

"There will be no disturbance. If it is the man we seek, show us a quiet way of taking him with us."

The pistol dropped from the man's nerveless hand as they entered the cubicle. "Who are you?" he shrieked. "What do you want?"

"Some friends in Pootung want to talk to you, Ling."

"I have not betrayed them. I swear it!"

"You have not betrayed what?" asked the voice of doom.

Gagged and trussed, Ling—for it was he—was carried down the stairs, to be thrown like a piece of merchandise into a horse-drawn carriage, which set off at once at a brisk pace in the direction of the house by the river.

As the carriage drew up before a side door, Willoughby, sitting in Kung's office sipping a whisky and soda, was asking, "Why is it, Mr Kung, that you are so interested in a man named Ling?"

"Because I dislike telling lies, Mr Willoughby, that is a question which I will not answer directly. But I will go so far as to say that if I ever find this Ling, some of my perplexities —and yours, I fancy—will vanish."

"When you find him, Mr Kung—if you have not already found him—I beg you will do nothing to outrage Western ideas of justice."

"Justice, Mr Willoughby," said Kung in a cold voice, "has no geography. I will be just. Look, there is a mosquito on your cheek. It is about to sting you."

Willoughby slapped at his cheek and by chance killed the mosquito.

"Was that Western or Eastern justice, Mr Willoughby?"

The Englishman remained silent. He allowed Kung to fill his glass again, and when it was empty said: "I would like always to think of you, Mr Kung, as a friend and—as you once said—an ally. Please, I urge you, do nothing to make that impossible. This Ling is a human being. Western justice says that he is innocent until he is proved guilty. My work in life is to bring Western justice here to this small corner of China."

"One day," said Kung dreamily, "the incurable sentimentality of the West will deliver it into the hands of the East. It will be a bad day for the world, because so much that is Western is admirable."

* * * * *

Ling was given a whole long night to meditate upon his position before any question was put to him. When he was brought before Kung in the morning he had managed somehow to work himself into a state of righteous indignation, believing

that he was in the hands of those who had controlled and organised the robbery. He and his direct accomplices had merely obeyed orders, although whence the orders had come was something he did not know.

"Not one word has passed my lips," he said stoutly. "I am no traitor, or betrayer of secret matters."

"Matters such as what, Ling?" asked Kung gently.

Then and then only did Ling realise that he had fallen into other hands. His courage ebbed from him like water. Strong with the knowledge that he had betrayed nothing, he had been prepared to do battle for what he conceived his honour. Now it was different.

The room into which he had been brought was closely curtained. Greatly puzzled, Ling watched Kung, who strode across the room, throwing wide one of the curtains. "Look well, Ling," said the latter, "for it may be that it is the last time you will ever see the sun."

"What do you want of me?" cried Ling, his voice shrill with anxiety.

"I want from you the names of all those who entered the godown with you a month ago, stealing much valuable merchandise and leaving behind seven men who, like you, will never see the sun again."

As Kung uttered these words he allowed the curtain to drop.

"I do not know what you mean. I know of no such matter."

"I am a man of some patience, Ling," came the stern but still gentle voice of Kung. "That patience is nearly at an end. Your words mean nothing. They beat vainly against the curtains of time, for you are already as one dead. I intend that you shall speak: if not one way, then another. If after speaking you were allowed free, death would come to you very swiftly, either by the executioner's sword, or at the hands of your late accomplices. These are facts, Ling. You must face them. Your life is forfeit and there is no longer any hope for you."

"If I tell you all, will you spare my life?"

"I have told you already that you are as one dead. Even if it were otherwise, I would not bargain with you. The means to make you speak are at hand. It is for you to decide, Ling, whether you will speak willingly, or—unwillingly. I hope

earnestly—for the sight and sound of a human being screaming in agony is degrading to all who see and hear it—that you will choose the former."

Ling looked across the room at Kung and he knew there was no mercy. He looked at the men who stood impassively beside him, unable to read anything in their faces. Although he knew there was no hope, the wretched man still clung to hope. Torture was something one heard about, but never experienced. It fell to vague, unknown people, but it did not seem logical or reasonable that it was written into his own destiny. So, foolishly, Ling sought to hedge and stall for time. Even while the men were strapping him to an iron grill, Ling did not believe that it was he who was about to suffer. Even when a hot iron was pressed under his right armpit, he knew a strange feeling of detachment and his own screams seemed to him unreal.

The infliction of pain, no less than its healing, is a science. Those who understand these matters say that the stoics of history who have endured torture without opening their mouths either knew nothing to tell, or were in the hands of bungling amateurs. Pain, inflicted by those who know their business, may be likened to the moods of a symphony and when it reaches the crashing, jangling crescendo of the finale, the subject has ceased to be a creature of will.

Before the questioning of Ling had gone thus far, Kung was impelled to reason once more with the man. "I beg you, Ling," he said, his voice vibrating with compassion, "do not force us to extremes. Tell us what you know before it is plucked from your vitals as with white-hot tongs."

"I tell you that I know nothing," screamed Ling from the shadowy land of his fool's paradise.

For reply Kung shrugged his shoulders and left the men to their work. "This is an evil thing," he murmured a few moments later before the shrine of his honoured ancestors, "but this is only one man. Many have already been butchered. Against these and the army of unfortunates who depend upon me, how can I allow this wretch to weigh in the scales? One must suffer that others may live . . . it has always been so."

In a little time they sent for Kung. Ling's lips were unsealed.

"I know the three who came with me to open the gates of the godown," Ling said, strangely calm. "Of the others who came across the water from the Pootung side, I know only my wife's brother."

"I think he lies," said Kung's nephew.

"Young man," said a grim-faced man, naked to the waist, who had been responsible for making Ling talk, "do not waste time talking such nonsense. This—thing cannot lie."

Within a few minutes men were seeking Ling's brother-in-law, and the three others who broached the gate of the godown. These men would know others, about whom the net would soon tighten.

"Do you wish to go on living a little longer?" asked Kung of Ling, who had been unshackled. "It is for you to decide."

"I think I would like to meet my honoured ancestors," replied Ling in a dead voice.

"May they forgive you the thing you have done," said Kung solemnly.

"In a little while a cup will be brought to your bedside. There is oblivion in the cup. When you are ready to join your honoured ancestors, drink it to the dregs. Because you have suffered much, Ling, it may be that they will not judge you too harshly."

They carried Ling to his bed very gently. Presently a cup was brought to him. He looked at it longingly until the door closed and he was alone. Then, because life had lost all savour, he drained the cup to the last drop.

* * * * *

The hunt had been on such a grand scale and the name Ling on so many lips that news of it was bound to have reached other members of the robber gang. As though he had not already been found and his body was not bobbing sadly on the Yangtsze current as it swept out into the China Sea, the hunt for Ling continued. While Ling still evaded capture, the other robbers would argue that they were safe. Alternatively, realising the danger to themselves, while Ling remained at liberty, the others might try to seek him out in order to close his mouth.

Even dead, Ling still had his uses.

The reward offered for Ling by the Greater Shanghai

Benevolent Society, therefore, was doubled. Before he died Ling had disclosed his usual haunts, and these were watched with the utmost care, so that any inquiring for him, however discreetly, would come under the Society's surveillance.

The brother-in-law of Ling committed this indiscretion, and as he left a tea-shop in the French Concession a sack was dropped over his head and the next thing he knew was when he awoke on a pallet bed in the house by the river. He was wiser than Ling had been. With a moistened thumb lashed into an electric light socket, which proved a potent loosener of his tongue, he was ready to tell everything within five minutes of the current being switched on. There would be no tell-tale marks on his body when the time came to deliver him to Western justice. He was only able to betray three of his accomplices, but they, when they were brought to a darkened room in the house by the river, betrayed five more. It is well not to dwell upon the details of the persuasions used: let it suffice to say that upon them, too, the means employed left no marks.

The five betrayed all the rest of the robbers, save only the leader, who had planned everything in security, while others went out to do the dangerous work. There was no lack of willingness to betray, for any one of them would have been willing to sell his own mother under questioning. Not one of them was willing to suffer as Ling had suffered.

Only a few tiny grains of fact emerged about this unknown leader. The first was that he was a very fat man, who spoke the Shanghai dialect fluently, but not as one who learned it at his mother's knee. The second was—three robbers confirmed this—that he had a servant with a cast in his right eye, who seemed to be a man of Canton. The third—and this the most important—was that he had been overheard to say when he had inspected a fine sable coat, lined with a thousand pairs of sable ears, that he would keep it for himself if he thought there would ever be any likelihood of wanting it.

Now a fine sable coat is a very valuable possession for the North China winter. A man who dismissed it thus might reasonably be assumed to be going to some warmer place. Of these places Canton itself and Hongkong seemed the most probable. There is a strict limit, it must be understood, to the

number of warm places on earth where any considerable body of Chinese may be found. The fact that the servant spoke with the accents of Canton need not have any great significance, for among all the Chinese peoples the Cantonese are the greatest wanderers. They were to be found in Singapore, Penang and all cities of the Malay Peninsula. They were to be found, likewise, in Indo-China, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Macao and Manila.

One evening, shortly after dark, three days after the questioning had ended, twenty-two men, securely gagged and chained together, were led out of the house by the river into a waiting *sampan*, which immediately put out into the stream. A mile or two downstream, not more than a quarter mile from the godown where they had perpetrated the robbery, the *sampan* drew into the bank at a spot where there was a disused boatyard. Here, rising out of the deep mud, were massive wooden piles which had once supported a pier, now fallen into ruins. Heavy iron ring-bolts, formerly used to take mooring lines, were let into the piles. The chain which bound the twenty-two men was securely fastened to these, and when the fastenings had been tested the men were left alone.

Barely five minutes later, in the billiard-room of a club in Hongklow, Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby, poised in the act of chalking his cue, was called to the telephone. After a brief conversation and even briefer apologies for breaking up a very pleasant game, he dashed out of the club and into a waiting rickshaw. With an extra dollar *cumshaw* to lend wings to his feet, the rickshaw puller arrived at the Garden Bridge, hard by the Astor House Hotel, a whole minute before the cars which came in the opposite direction from the Central Police Station.

"I think it's a hoax," Willoughby said when he read the note, "but the way things are we daren't take a chance. Come on."

The cars sped through Hongkew, their horns making a hideous din, and did not slacken speed until they came abreast of the abandoned boatyard. Two Chinese detectives armed with axes made short work of a rusty chain fastening the gates.

Waist deep in mud and still shackled, twenty-two utterly bewildered men, who had assumed that they were to be left where they were until the tide rose to drown them, were led uncomplainingly to the street. Since there was no other vehicle

available to transport them, Willoughby commandeered a passing tramcar, evicted the disgruntled passengers and, with interior lights extinguished, ordered the indignant driver to return to the central part of the city.

In accordance with the standards of the West, the men were taken to clean and reasonably comfortable cells in the Central Police Station and, as suggested by the anonymous note delivered by an unknown rickshaw coolie, certain questions were put to them, but not until they had been warned that any statements they might be impelled to make would be used against them at their trials.

"Why waste time asking these questions again?" asked one of their number, an uncouth man who considered the formula stupid. "We have told you already all we know."

"Nevertheless," persisted Willoughby, who did not feel at all comfortable. "I should like to hear it again in case you were lying."

It was approaching dawn before Willoughby felt justified in issuing to an expectant press a statement to the effect that, by unremitting efforts on the part of the Shanghai Municipal Police, the entire gang concerned in the robbery of valuable furs and precious metals at the godown in the Yangtszepoo district, involving the murder of eight innocent men, had been captured and would shortly appear for trial.

The English-language press was loud in its praise of Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby and the loyal body of Chinese detectives responsible for putting this dangerous gang under lock and key.

The vernacular press awarded praise less lavishly. Strange rumours were running around Shanghai, and if these were true the police had been somewhat less than wonderful. But in order not to appear ungracious, or to be too damning with faint praise, the Chinese newspapers agreed that "law-abiding citizens will now sleep more easily in their beds." One journal with leanings a long way left of centre qualified this by adding: ". . . at least those fortunate enough to possess beds."

Everybody—everybody that is except the hero of the occasion—considered that Willoughby and his subordinates had done a very fine piece of work.

CHAPTER V

To leave Shanghai in the direction of a climate so warm that a rich man would not require a fur coat, involved leaving by sea, for at that time there was no rail or road communication with South China. The stewards aboard every ship leaving for any southern ports were, therefore, an obvious source of information to be tapped. Into the hands of every one of these on the day of sailing was put a small slip of paper, bearing the imprint of the ships' stewards' guild. It read:

> $1,000 REWARD: Friends will pay this sum for news of a portly person, seemingly a merchant of means, who speaks the Shanghai dialect fluently, but not as a native son. His body servant, who may travel with him, is a man of Canton who has a cast in his right eye. It may well be that the baggage of this portly person is heavy.

Simultaneously, in case this portly person should escape the vigilance of ships' stewards who are, almost without exception, men of acute perceptions, word went south to Chinese communities in the Straits Settlements, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, the Philippines and, of course, to the cities of South China and Indo-China, to the effect that news was urgently wanted of a person answering this description. To avoid any possible confusion, a statement was added that the wanted man could not have left Shanghai before the date when the godown robbery had taken place.

Kung, not only because of his illustrious ancestry, but on account of his personal qualities, had many friends in remote places. A communication from him was sure of respectful attention.

Then, when these things were done and Kung was satisfied

that nothing had been left undone to track down the man who had been the inspiration and brains of the robbery, as well as the recipient of the major part of the loot, he settled down to the more prosaic task of restoring lost face to the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society, whose financial condition was altogether lamentable.

The task was one of extreme delicacy. Full credit in the public eye for the capture of the robber gang had gone to the police. To have allowed any other explanation to be too widely believed would have been a gross indiscretion, for it would have incurred the bitter enmity of the police by advertising a certain ineptness on the part of this usually efficient force. It must be remembered that although more than nineteen-twentieths of the population of Shanghai was Chinese, the entire government of the International Settlement was in the hands of the Treaty Powers, primarily the British and Americans, with other foreign powers playing smaller parts. Futhermore, the chief *raison d'être* of the Shanghai Municipal Police was to protect the lives and property of foreigners. All other considerations were secondary. To do anything to shatter foreign belief in the efficiency of this force would be highly impolitic. Only a fool deliberately courts powerful enemies. None knew better than Kung that the power he possessed would be halved if it were generally known.

Nevertheless, it was essential for the very existence of the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society that some whisper of the part it had played in the capture of the robber gang be known in the city, for the flow of contributions to its coffers would always vary in direct ratio to the public belief in its efficacy.

To Kung was left the delicate task of balancing discretion against calculated indiscretion so that, without making Willoughby and his department appear foolish, the Society should assure to itself some measure of credit. Nevertheless, in the most valuable circle of all, that of the thieves of the metropolis, there was already an awareness that the Society possessed strong teeth and claws and was prepared to use them.

"The time has come," Kung told his trusted nephew, "when the protection of the Society can only be extended to those whose benevolence make its work possible."

The young man took his thought away with him, digested it, coming at length to the conclusion that he understood its inward meaning.

It seemed to this young man, on whose shoulders one day, in the absence of a son, the mantle of Kung would fall, that from its very nature the essence of this thought was not one suitable for communication publicly to those sheltering under the Society's wing in the house by the river. It were better disseminated, he decided, by means of discreet whispers.

While the hungry throng—now returned to full rations—was eating the evening rice, Kung's nephew and a few men of proven discretion, circulated in the dining-hall. They noted as they went a certain unrest for, as a poet feels the need to rhyme, so the thief is often impelled to steal. Already in the grounds of the house the pickpockets, lest their fingers lose their deftness, spent long hours together perfecting and maintaining their technique. They feared the arrival of the day when, wearied by excessive virtue, they would sally forth into the streets to ply their trade, only to find that fingers which could once steal the whiskers from a sleeping cat had lost their cunning.

That evening, before the rice-bowls had been washed, the thought dropped by Kung into his nephew's mind, like a stone into a pool of placid water, had spread throughout the dining-hall in ever-widening ripples. There was now an awareness among the unfortunates gathered there—no more than that—that while the Society's hand would fall heavily upon those who dared to rob premises protected by the Society's chop, its displeasure would be very much less severe if premises not bearing the Society's chop were entered and robbed. It would, of course, be entirely deplorable. Robbery of any kind was deplorable, but only the benevolent could reasonably expect the Society's protection. It was to be deplored at the same time that so many persons in Shanghai, having had repeated opportunities to prove their benevolence, had they been benevolently inclined, had failed to do so.

"That means," observed a very coarse-minded thief, grinning widely, "that so long as there is no chop on the door, we can steal what we like. I know a foreign house in the Carter Road

which will be empty to-night. When the cook, who was a friend of mine, was dismissed, he took a copy of the key. For two dollars he would lend it to me. Who has two dollars?"

"You must not say such things, my friend," observed Kung's nephew in shocked tones, "not even in jest."

"But," said the thief, "there is no harm in thinking them, I suppose."

"Only heaven can direct the thoughts of men into the channels of virtue," was the pious reply.

Despite this mild reproof, however, by borrowing from among his neighbours at table, the thief managed to raise two dollars. The key, furthermore, fitted the front door of the house in Carter Road and, as he had said, the owners and their servants were absent. The haul was worth, according to the newspapers, $7,000, but a rascally receiver of stolen property would only pay $300 for it.

There were others, too, that night in the dining-hall who put a similar evil interpretation upon the lightly-uttered thought which had been dropped in their ears, but they were all very careful not to rob premises which were protected by the Society's chop. Only those degraded persons devoid of benevolence and finer feelings suffered the robbery of their premises, and for these, by general consent, it was hard to feel any great sympathy.

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There were two men in Shanghai, each with urgent reasons for wishing to talk to the other, but neither caring to take the initiative for fear of appearing eager. These two men were Willoughby and Kung.

The former was in a most difficult position. It was one thing to set in motion the organisation of an efficient detective force in an endeavour to catch a band of desperate robbers and murderers, just as it was quite another to follow the directions of an anonymous note and to go to a disused boatyard, there to find the entire gang neatly chained together and so eager to confess that it was positively embarrassing. In certain circumstances, as Willoughby himself was painfully aware, this most miraculous success, coming at a time when the police were under

the fire of hostile criticism, could very easily become even more embarrassing than abject failure had been.

That twenty-two desperate men, facing certain execution, would meet voluntarily, chain themselves to piles set in the mud and ooze of the Whangpoo, was so unlikely that even public credulity could not be expected to swallow it.

When the twenty-two men appeared at the International Mixed Court for the preliminary hearing of the charges of robbery and murder, Willoughby, by virtue of his office, appeared for the police. He was not, he had stated, ready to go to trial in view of the numbers of the defendants and the complex task of sifting evidence. He had offered, therefore, perfunctory evidence of arrest and his assurance that the defendants had confessed to the commission of the outrage, throwing himself on the Court's discretion in asking for a remand of at least fifteen and preferably double that number of days. This period of time would, he reminded the Court, give the defendants also time to prepare a defence and to consult with legal advisers. To his enormous relief, the Court had granted Willoughby the respite he wanted.

But time was slipping away and Willoughby was no nearer any satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon than he had been when his game of billiards had been so rudely interrupted. It was very pleasant, of course, to bask in the public esteem as a kind of reincarnated Sherlock Holmes, and to listen to the complimentary remarks of his contemporaries, but it did not alter the fact that if someone in Shanghai told all he knew, the Shanghai Municipal Police were going to look extremely foolish. That someone, he had never for a moment doubted, was Kung, with whom he urgently wanted a quiet chat.

Kung's reasons for wanting to talk to Willoughby were otherwise, although he was, of course, fully aware of the reasons behind the other's reluctance to seek the interview. In contriving the capture of the entire gang, Kung had put himself and his Society outside the law, if only by usurping the functions of the law. By strictly Western standards his behaviour had been too outrageous to be condoned. Men had been kidnapped under the nose of the law. They had been held illegally in confinement and while thus held had been forced to confess

under duress. Powerful as he was, Kung did not fall into the error of over-estimating his power. He had no least doubt that if the truth ever emerged in its entirety, the International Mixed Court would rise in wrath and horror, refusing to convict men whose confessions had been extracted under torture. The whole western concept of justice would be outraged and in the débâcle which followed there could be no doubt that both Kung and the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society would be swept away. Worse than all, the name of the Great Sage, borne by one of his descendants, would be dishonoured in the eyes of the world.

Kung was confident, knowing the other's predicament, that if he and Willoughby could thrash this thing out together quietly and without heat or rancour, the advantages to be gained by both of them, if they could compose their differing concepts of justice, would prove too obvious to be ignored.

Kung was already aware that he was being shadowed by two of Willoughby's men, and he guessed, rightly, that this was for the purpose of contriving a meeting in such a manner that it would appear accidental. He himself had had Willoughby shadowed and for precisely the same reason.

On learning that Willoughby would be at the opening day of the Kiangwan Races which, being outside the International Settlement, was so to speak neutral ground, Kung decided that he would allow himself to be met accidentally there. It was a long while since he had had any recreation and racing was one of his minor weaknesses. One day he expected to have to answer for this before the Court of his Ancestors, for Confucius was on record in the most emphatic manner as disapproving of feats of endurance and strength, and he would most assuredly disapprove of his latter-day descendant patronising such exhibitions.

In the most delightfully casual manner, involving neither of them in any loss of face or self-esteem, Kung and Willoughby met in the paddock at Kiangwan. They met as two old friends, their faces wreathed in smiles of pleasure.

"It is a double pleasure to see you here to-day, Mr Willoughby," said Kung. "There is first the pleasure in meeting one whom I esteem highly, and then there is pleasure in the

thought that your presence here on this beautiful afternoon means that virtue has triumphed over the wicked in Shanghai. As your great Robert Browning puts it so beautifully:

'*God's in His heaven—all's right with the world.*'"

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Mr Kung," said Willoughby, who was not addicted to flowery speech. "I'm glad you can get away from the cares of your Society."

"We have not met since your recent great triumph, Mr Willoughby. If somewhat late, my congratulations are none the less sincere. All Shanghai rings with your praise. I am told that you, without regard to the risks involved, arrested those twenty-two desperate robbers and murderers personally. Let us hope that before long, when these miscreants come to trial, the details of your heroism will be known far and wide."

Willoughby was not good at this sort of thing. He had learned his lessons in a blunter school. By Western rules—the only ones in which he had any noticeable skill—the moment had come for one or the other to say: "Now come off it and let's get down to brass tacks." But, by allowing Kung the initiative, the game was going to be played by Eastern rules. Of these Willoughby was a better master than most Westerners, but that was to say very little.

"I find," said Willoughby, lapsing briefly into Mandarin Chinese and thereby subtly gaining a trifling advantage, "that the rôle of hero does not sit too well upon me. I prefer to be known as a diligent person who seeks merely to do his duty."

"That," observed Kung in English, in which language they continued to talk, "is merely one more proof of your great modesty."

"Let us leave my well-known modesty out of the question, Mr Kung, for, like other men, I have my little vanities, although to strut like a hero does not happen to be one of them. Do you not agree with me that the time has come for a little frankness between us?"

"The time for complete frankness between friends is always with us, Mr Willoughby. But as I speak I am not aware of any lack of frankness between us."

"I call it lack of frankness, Mr Kung, when you shower me

with compliments for—your own achievements. Yours is the modesty—not mine."

"Ah!" said Kung, managing to inject into the monosyllable more meaning than it is possible to put on paper. "Frankness, as we Chinese understand the word, does not consist of stating the obvious. Being men of intelligence, surely we can take the obvious in our stride?"

"Meaning," said Willoughby with his Western insistence on precision, "that it was obvious to both of us that twenty-two persons whom we need not specify owed their predicament to —you?"

"Let us agree that these twenty-two persons did not find themselves where they were found without, shall we say, my knowledge. What does it matter? The ends of justice have been served. Their guilt cries out to heaven for vengeance...."

"The end is beyond criticism, Mr Kung. As to the means, I am not so sure. Let us suppose, for example, that these men of whom we are speaking employ a clever lawyer. The first question he will ask them in privacy is: How comes it that you were all so ready to confess your crime? What do you think their reply will be? Will they say that suddenly and simultaneously they were impelled to repent? I think not, Mr Kung. They will say that confessions were wrung from them by torture."

"Doubtless, Mr Willoughby, they could substantiate such a statement by showing the marks of torture?"

"You know as well as I know, Mr Kung, that there are no marks. Two doctors have examined them well. Nevertheless, it would not require a very clever lawyer to cause the Court to doubt whether their confessions were voluntary."

"You evidently do not know, Mr Willoughby, that an eminent Chinese lawyer, Dr Soong-li, has already undertaken their defence. I do not believe," Kung said slowly, "that Dr Soong-li would find it necessary to ask such questions."

"Who pays Dr Soong-li's fee?"

"Charitably inclined persons, Mr Willoughby."

The detective allowed all the implications of this to sink in for a few moments, during which he forgot his twenty years in the East and became for a while wholly Western. It was

plain enough that Dr Soong-li, in return for an adequate fee, paid without doubt by Kung, was prepared to conduct the defence of these twenty-two men in such a manner that they would go to their deaths with sealed mouths. The veins in his neck swelled as his indignation rose. "What you propose, Mr Kung, is murder—the crime of which these twenty-two men stand accused. I'll have no part of it, do you understand, *no matter what it may cost me personally*. Until a Court has proven them guilty, they are innocent men. I've broken the rules a few times, but, by God! I won't have a thing like that on my conscience. . . ."

"Forgive me," said Kung gently, and, strangely, without any irony, "I had forgotten the Western conscience. Let me ask you this one thing, Mr Willoughby: Does there rest in your mind one small shred of doubt as to the guilt of all these men?"

"No, they're guilty as hell, every one of them."

"You agree that justice will be served when they meet the executioner?"

"Of course!"

"Then it is merely the method which causes your indignation to rise? Yours is honest indignation, too. I perceive that. So much indignation for such unworthy men! You will laugh, Mr Willoughby, but you have shocked me profoundly. If you entertained any doubt, I would understand and applaud your attitude. But you *know* them to be guilty and, in spite of it, your orderly Western mind insists that the forms be observed. You would allow these callous murderers to go free, rather than omit the dotting of an *i* and the crossing of a *t* in the manner of their trial? Am I right?"

"I am a sworn servant of the law, Mr Kung. I am prepared to admit to you that, whatever the methods used to bring about that end, justice demands that these men die. But the law which would send them to their deaths gives those men certain rights. One of these rights is a legal defence. The law demands that some person skilled in the law shall defend them to the utmost limits of his skill, so that every point which might tell in their favour shall be brought to the attention of the Court."

"This case will not be tried in the passionless atmosphere

of the Old Bailey, Mr Willoughby. This is China, where, although our methods may be different, most of the guilty are punished and almost all the innocent escape. We are not savages."

"This crime was committed under a jurisdiction which is predominantly Western, Mr Kung, and it will be punished accordingly. . . ."

"You foreigners have camped on a few hundred acres of China. Do you hope thereby to make the smallest impression on a civilisation which was already old when Rome rescued yours from savagery? Would you take a pail of manure and hope thereby to fertilise two million square miles of China and, when you failed, shed tears of anger for the failure? In so many things you Westerners are admirable, but you do not understand justice. Most of the people living here in Shanghai are law-abiding, decent people, anxious to be allowed to work hard in peace and security. Are they not entitled to justice, too? Yet you—because of a slavish adherence to method—would turn loose among them twenty-two men who have proved themselves human tigers."

"Does it not occur to you, Mr Kung, that millions can live and work in peace, safe in the knowledge that nobody dare take from *them* their rights? Western justice is not perfect, but it tries to be so. Chinese justice has foundered in the morass of its own corruption. . . ."

"We have reached," said Kung with a smile, "one of the many roads which the East and the West cannot travel together in understanding. I pay you the compliment of believing in your sincerity. It will be easier for both of us if you believe in mine. My proposals for a way out of our little difficulty do not please you. Doubtless you have others. I would like to hear them."

"I have no proposals, Mr Kung," said Willoughby. "I am aware that when these men come to trial it lies in your power to end my career. You have only to make it known to the Court the circumstances of their arrest and my position would be untenable. I admit that. If you refrain from this course you have, I imagine, a price. I want to know that price. If I find it too high I shall not pay it. That is all."

"The price—the word was yours, remember—is a recogni-

tion by you that I and my Society are on the side of law and order, even if our methods differ. I offer you an alliance."

"Provided that alliance does not involve me in matters which conflict with my duty, I accept. Since neither of us knows exactly what the alliance involves, let us continue to regard ourselves as allies until one of us says frankly to the other that it must end."

"It is agreed," said Kung; "but before we part—and already people are wondering what holds us in talk—I would like to leave you with a thought. If I conscientiously do what my race and upbringing tell me is right, and you, as I believe, do the same, we may travel what appear to be different roads, but we shall arrive at the same destination. In England once I had to endure laughter because of our Chinese respect for our ancestors, yet in Westminster Abbey I found more elaborate and costly tombs than there are in all China. It is the surface only which is different. Beneath the surface there is less to distinguish us. Beneath the surface men of goodwill, no matter what their race, manage to arrive at the same ends. We, I believe, are both men of goodwill."

For the rest of the afternoon Willoughby tried to examine his conscience with an unprejudiced eye, finding it an illuminating and somewhat disconcerting exercise. At the end he approached nearer to understanding the East than he had ever been. It was his own inconsistencies which helped. It shocked him to realise how often, as a policeman, he had tricked ignorant malefactors out of their legal rights. He had played all the grubby police tricks to secure convictions, coaxing one man into indiscretions by telling him his confederate had accused him, feeding the jealousies of women until they betrayed their men, turning a deaf ear to perjury when it suited his needs, and all the rest of the chicanery outside the spirit and letter of the law. He had always justified himself by what he believed to be knowledge of guilt before adopting such methods. Now, when there was absolute certainty of guilt, he could not bring himself to hasten the day when the twenty-two men in custody would meet the executioner, by allowing a pretence of legal aid to satisfy the conventions. That, as Kung had said, these were human tigers, made no difference. That, if they were turned

loose again on Society, perhaps scores of innocent people would be done to death and he himself subjected to hostile criticism, seemed unimportant beside the Anglo-Saxon belief that every man was innocent until proved otherwise.

Willoughby was finding it very difficult to justify his attitude logically, but he clung tenaciously to the belief that the cynicism and sophistry of the East sprang from the incalculable depths of its depravity and corruption. There was a great temptation to fall in with Kung's idea of an alliance. Kung, if he had his way, *would* build up an organisation so strong that it would wipe out robbery and kindred crimes, but in doing so he would hold Shanghai to ransom, which in itself was a crime, although of another order.

These musings did not permit Willoughby to go one step further and to wonder whether much of his righteous indignation sprang from the knowledge that in an ideal civilisation police were superfluous; whether the existence of a criminal population was not Society's own crime for which Society was morally obligated to pay, one way or another; whether Kung's methods —heathen methods—were not at bottom more civilised and more truly Christian than Western police methods.

Willoughby did not like abstract thinking, for it shattered too many images, making the rule-of-thumb standards by which he had lived not very satisfying or, on analysis, very convincing.

It is probable that this very worthy policeman, who tried to live by his principles, would have felt much better had he known something of the perplexities which beset Kung, this real or unreal descendant of the Great Sage. Kung went home from the races understanding, better than he had ever understood before, the strange rectitude of the West which had pinned its faith to certain outward forms. These outward forms, Kung was now beginning to understand, represented a striving towards perfection, no less than a humble admission that perfection itself still lay upon a far horizon. It caused Kung to wonder whether the Confucian conception of civilisation had not reached and passed its zenith centuries before he himself was born and that all whereof he was witness was the corruption which awaits the most perfect fruit.

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Quong, the portly compradore of the Shanghai General Insurance Company, was troubled. His fat face, usually wreathed in smiles, was now criss-crossed with deep wrinkles, which assumed almost the proportions of puckers. Quong understood insurance in all its aspects, but he lacked something of the aloof detachment of the Scotch actuarial mentality which prefers to deal in averages and mathematical probabilities rather than in the flesh and bones of business.

Losses, as Quong saw things, were losses, and not mere manifestations of timeless mathematical principles. Worse than this: they were avoidable losses. Gordon Burnside's philosophy did not satisfy this shrewd man. "If there were no risks," Burnside had said, "there would be no insurance. The best safeguard of an insurance company is risks. Its best advertisement is to meet claims honourably and without undue haggling."

The Shanghai General—and everyone knew it—was meeting more than its expected share of claims. Face had to a large extent been restored to the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society, with the result that many insurance policies were lapsing, as indication of the public belief that the Society's "chop" on premises was a better protection against thieves than insurance. The penalties for burglary were now severe, and maximum sentences the rule, so that burglars caught in the act were not slow to add murder to their crimes, if murder could prevent them falling into the hands of the police. Insurance against burglary merely protected the householder from loss, by reimbursing him in cash for the approximate value of property stolen, but insurance had no consolation to offer to the man found with his throat slit.

Besides, a contribution to the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society was quite positively cheaper than insurance, as well as being far more effective.

In these years immediately following the Revolution, which had turned China from a crumbling Empire, bogged down in the mire of its own corruption, into a Republic which was floundering in the legacy of chaos it had inherited, there was a tendency to blame foreigners for everything. Much of this blame was merited. The insurance companies—at all events

those which met their obligations—were foreign, predominantly British owned. Why, many Chinese were asking themselves, enrich foreign companies when a purely Chinese organisation will protect us more efficiently and more cheaply?

It was a potent argument.

In a few days the twenty-two robbers would come to trial. Although in theory the triumph of their capture belonged to the police, it was generally believed that somewhere in the background lurked the hidden hand of Kung. Here was proof, if it were needed, that it was not healthy to rob premises protected by the Society's "chop". Nevertheless, among the more prosperous Chinese merchants there was the tacit hope that the struggle between the insurance interests and the Society would end in stalemate. They did not want to see the Society become so strong that it could dictate terms, while at the same time it was an excellent thing to have the Society as a lever to be applied from time to time against the insurance interests.

Quong was now awaiting a call from a wealthy silk merchant, Lao-chu-ping, whose expiring policy was for an impressive sum, well into seven figures. From the manner in which the appointment had been made and a certain coyness about renewal, Quong had a fair idea of the form the discussion would take.

After the preliminary exchange of courtesies demanded by custom and good manners, Lao was not slow to come to the point.

"We live in strange times," he began. "Things are not as they were—not even insurance."

"You refer to the trifling losses which insurance has sustained? They are as nothing, let me assure you. If they continued at four times the present scale for five years—which, you will agree, is an impossibility—our dividend would be unchanged."

"The Stock Exchange holds a contrary view," retorted Lao, looking over the tops of steel-rimmed spectacles. "However, my purpose in coming here was not to cast doubts upon the financial security of your honourable company, whose reputation for fair dealing is too old and too solid to be impugned. It is merely that I find the premiums too high. In confidence, I may say, I am about to contribute $10,000 to the funds of the Greater

Shanghai Benevolent Society. The risk assumed by your honourable company, you will agree, is therefore considerably lessened. In short, I am here to negotiate with you a premium which will reflect the lessened risk."

"The society of which you speak," said Quong, choosing his words with extreme care, for he knew every word would be repeated to Kung, "may, if it continues long enough, justify such arrangement as you suggest, but prudence dictates that too much reliance cannot be placed on such methods for a few years."

"There is another thing," said Lao, brushing aside Quong's words as though he had not heard them. "Mere money would not begin to compensate me for the loss of my valuable stocks. There are certain articles which I will not sell for ten times the value admitted in my insurance policy. There are embroideries, brocaded silks and delicate fabrics which can never be replaced, for the hands which worked on them are gone and the skill was never passed on to others. Since the Revolution, as you know, the Anking cross-stitch work has been forbidden. The pieces in existence are beyond price. People come from all over the world to admire them, and while they are in my humble shop they buy other things. Museums have offered me sums which would astound you for some of my best pieces. Your honourable company would pay me large sums of money if they were stolen, but it would do nothing to discourage thieves. The Society of which we speak—and of which my opinion is higher than yours—is able to discourage thieves."

"There is much good sense in what you say," said Quong with pursed lips, "but, as old friends, let me tell you in confidence that this honourable company's policy is to ignore the existence of the Society of which you speak. I will, of course, mention your proposal to the respected Burnside, but I fear I already know his answer."

"When mentioning my proposal," said Lao softly, "it might be as well to mention that every member of the Silk Guild thinks as I think. The same is true of the Silversmiths' Guild, and will shortly be true of other honourable guilds in this city. I should be reluctant to sever a connection which has lasted so many years, but . . ."

" Do not speak of such a thing, my friend. It must not be."

" Yet I fear it will be, unless the respected Burnside can learn to bend his head a little. Because we are old friends, we two, I will mention one more matter which I had intended to keep to myself: other insurance companies in this city are adopting a more reasonable attitude. You will, I trust, convey my greetings to the respected Burnside and tell him that when next he passes my shop it will be a pleasure to give him a piece of embroidery that will delight the eye of his wife. It is a small thing I have been keeping for him for many months."

Quong managed to maintain his beaming smile until his visitor had been ushered into his carriage, but after that was done it failed him.

CHAPTER VI

Nobody knew better than that pretty little doll known as Pearl, glorified by some as Pearl of the Morning, that to fall from her pinnacle of success would prove a great deal easier than it had been to climb. She had the shrewdness also to realise that all she had was her beauty. When that had faded, unless she played her cards well, she would become such another as her mother: a dumpy, harassed, unlovely woman of the coolie class, embittered by poverty. Success to Pearl had not so far been a very tangible thing, in the sense that her financial rewards had been disproportionately small when viewed in the light of her prominence. Her earnings had enabled her to live in comfort, wear luxurious clothes and such jewels as she could coax from admirers, but to date they did not represent security for the future.

Success had meant, in brief, that she had been able to pay her way while practising her calling. It had meant that her beauty was always on show to the rich men who frequented the places where she performed. This prominence—and thus her employers justified their small pay—put her in the way of selling her beauty on what was probably the highest market in all China. When she stood upon a stage to sing she was, in effect, upon an auction block. Rich old merchants had made fantastic offers for her favours. Personable but poor young men had made outrageous avowals. If she were compelled to, Pearl was resolved to accept one of the former, but she still hoped that this would not be necessary. Only one man among the many who had made various proposals to her had pricked the tough skin of her egoism. That man was Kung. Perhaps it was that his handsome face, carefully modulated voice and aristocratic bearing, represented to her everything she was not and could not be. She loved to listen to his flowery metaphor, but she loved best of all the sense of power which his

infatuation gave her. She envied his culture, and out of that envy sprang a desire to insult and humiliate him.

The others, the heavy-breathing, corpulent merchants, disgusted her. For the sake of their money, if she had to, she would endure their maulings, but only as a last resort. Technically, Pearl still possessed her virginity, but it was a technicality which in China meant more than in other countries. The man whose dearly-bought privilege it might be to deflower her would pay a high price in order to be able to boast that he had done so. Her virginity, therefore, could only go on the auction block once, for its loss was sure to be advertised far and wide by the highest bidder. In this, it will be seen, Pearl was at a great disadvantage as compared with some of her Western sisters, who sell in a somewhat less discriminating market.

Kung at this time was a man between forty and forty-five years of age. He was not dissipated, so despite a great fund of other kinds of worldly wisdom, his knowledge of women was refreshingly small. Pearl was not in love with him, but she was as near love as she was ever likely to approach. Kung could give her what none of these others could give, so she was prepared to be patient. It was, of course, too much to expect marriage, for a man in Kung's position would not entertain such an idea, but it would be enough to become his acknowledged mistress.

According to popular report, Kung had married early in life the daughter of a Mandarin in high favour at the Court of Peking. This young wife, or so it was said, had been an incomparable beauty. In bearing Kung a daughter she had lost her own life. Kung had thereafter devoted many years to scholarly pursuits, not only in China, but in Europe. Now, just at a time when it might have been expected that he was settling down to a sedate middle-age, a chance meeting with Pearl at a banquet had rekindled fires which he had believed dead. Although he knew her to be an unworthy little slut, her dainty body and childishly innocent face had sapped his reason.

Pearl understood much of this, but what she could not understand was that a man who professed to be so infatuated and through whose hands so much money passed, could hesitate

to take whatever money he needed to gratify his passion. As her simple philosophy saw things, it was so insulting to her. Naturally, she intended to extract far more than the $80,000 trinket on which she had set her heart, but that, and acknowledgment as Kung's mistress, would suffice for a time. The rest could come later. Pearl had her pride, which would not permit her to accept anything less. Already she had it arranged with the jeweller that when Kung bought the trinket, word would be passed around that it had cost four times the real amount. But Kung had not bought the trinket, nor any trinket. Instead, he sent her flowers and poems written upon silk, which she did not understand. Whether in the East or the West, flowers and poems are seldom an acceptable alternative to jewels. In Pearl they aroused fury.

Hers was a strange predicament. It seemed so terribly unfair, as Pearl saw things. Had it not been for her position she would have given herself to Kung for nothing. But pride made this quite impossible. She wanted to hear the buzz of eager comment when it was known that she had sold her virtue for a fantastic sum, for this would be the final accolade, the seal of triumph, set upon a splendid career.

Pearl had a plan. Not a very clever plan, because she was not a very clever girl, but still a plan. The basis of the plan, because she was not very clever, was to humiliate Kung. If sufficiently humiliated, she believed, he would become more pliable to her will. So now she sat waiting in her little reception-room for his coming. As usual, he was late. All her other admirers arrived punctually. In his honour she wore trousers of cerise satin and a jacket of royal blue, heavily embroidered with cerise, to say nothing of her best and sweetest behaviour. If these did not bring him down off his high-faluting perch, she argued, then he must take the consequences.

Pearl received Kung more graciously than ever before, even condescending to smell the roses before she pitched them to a servant.

Pearl had a brother, a most unworthy person. In a world which will only tolerate large and successful thieves, this brother was a small and unsuccessful thief. In proof that hers

was not a very good plan, this brother of Pearl's was an essential part of it.

"I am very unhappy," remarked Pearl when her maid brought some hot rice wine. "Everyone is laughing at me, saying that I am a failure."

"And yet," said Kung, having a fair idea of what was coming, "I hear on all sides that your songs have captivated all Shanghai. How can you speak thus lightly of failure?"

"A girl in my position needs a protector. I have no protector. People are weary of the sight of my jewels, for I never have any new ones. They say that Pearl of the Morning is losing her charms. Say it is not true!"

"To one person at least you are the one and only Pearl of the Morning. Your beauty never fails to intoxicate this humble person. . . ."

"Then let us send a messenger at once to Lok-wen, the jeweller. What is eighty thousand dollars to the great Kung? Everyone speaks of your power and greatness. Even the police fear you. When you are my protector everyone will fear me."

"I do not know whether the trinket is worth the sum which Lok-wen demands," said Kung, weakening a little. "I would need to have the stones appraised before I agreed."

"To please me and because I am very unhappy, will you allow Lok-wen to bring the stones here—now, on approval. He would trust you for ten times such a sum."

"There can be no harm in that," said Kung. "We can examine the stones together and in the morning, if I think them worth the sum asked, I will discuss the matter with Lok-wen. But I make no promise beyond that."

Pearl clapped her hand with delight and, ringing for her maid-servant, sent a messenger to the jeweller, who was waiting in a near-by tea-house. Although she had extracted no promise, she appeared highly delighted. Kung, for his part, had by no means decided that he would buy the stones. Merely to have them on approval committed him to nothing. Although he was not a rich man, it was true, as Pearl had said, that his credit stood very high. At the back of Kung's mind was the thought that he might come to some arrangement with Lok-wen,

whose stocks of precious stones were enormous, under which, without money changing hands, he receive very special protection from the Society. If Lok-wen were agreeable, some amicable arrangment of the kind might be made Meanwhile, Kung intended to make sure that the stones remained in his own keeping.

During the brief wait for the jeweller Pearl, who was not at all subtle, became very tender. She wore less paint than usual, knowing that Kung disapproved. Her youthful beauty showed to better advantage. Pearl might have saved herself much trouble, for Kung was not in the smallest degree interested in her character or her mental qualities. It was her tiny, slender body which held him enslaved. Indeed, as a personality, she simply did not exist to him.

When Lok-wen arrived he brought with him three pieces of jewellery. One was a bracelet of emeralds and diamonds, a second a magnificent bar brooch of diamonds, and the third a rope of natural pearls.

"This is not a matter on which I choose to make up my mind at once," said Kung when these were spread before him and the prices made. "Leave these with me for a matter of a few hours and I will give you my decision to-morrow."

"The respected Kung knows that in the house of Lok his credit is good for any amount and any length of time," said the jeweller. "And now, because the hour is late, I will leave you. I shall be happy if you will compare values anywhere else in Shanghai."

Lok-wen made a hurried, almost too hurried, departure. While his footsteps were still audible on the stairs, Pearl had put the rope of pearls around her neck, pinned the brooch on her jacket and slipped the bracelet over her left wrist. Her eyes were dancing with the excitement of a child in front of a Christmas tree.

"Which of these three pieces pleases you most?" asked Kung.

"All of them!" was the unrehearsed reply. "But if you were so cruel as to take two of them away from me—and you could not be so cruel—then I do not think I could part with the pearls."

"I cannot take away from you that which is not yours," said Kung with meaning. "So it is the pearls which please you most. For that I am glad. The glitter of precious stones ill becomes radiant youth. They glitter because man has interfered with the work of Nature, whereas the pearls are heaven's work, unadorned. Nevertheless, at the asking price of $110,000 I consider them too dear." With that Kung deftly removed all three pieces of jewellery and, replacing them in their cases, put them beside him on the table. "In the morning I will see our friend Lok-wen, and I may—I promise nothing—then have news for you."

Kung was pleasantly surprised that this announcement did not bring forth a torrent of tears and recriminations. He was in that condition when men's critical faculties do not work very efficiently, or he would have noticed that Pearl's eyes, instead of filling with tears, glinted with something which might have been construed as triumph. Kung had already forgotten the jewels. His mind had strayed once more to that of which the jewels were the purchase price. It is highly probable that, if these two had been left undisturbed, Kung would ere long have made a rash promise. This, however, is mere speculation, for at that moment Kung's fevered reverie was interrupted by Pearl, who opened a window and, standing in full view of any who might be watching, lit a cigarette.

From that moment the plan—Pearl's not very good plan—began to operate. From that moment, too, the author of the plan no longer had any control of it.

Before she had smoked more than half of the cigarette, which had been lit as a signal, Pearl's brother and a companion entered the house by a rear door. The maidservant—this was, of course, a part of the plan—had gone out.

If Kung's ordinarily acute perceptions had been functioning, he would have remarked Pearl's tenseness, no less than her excessive amiability, but his mind was hovering in a dream world of venery, whose narrow limits were bounded by the tiny arms of the girl who had brought him unresisting to the verge of the follies he contemplated with delight.

In the momentary panic when, with a bag dropped neatly over his head, Kung was seized by two strong young men,

he did not even notice Pearl's failure to scream with fear, which, if hers had been a good plan, she must have done.

While Kung and Pearl lay bound securely on the floor of the little reception-room, it seems the appropriate moment to disclose in its entirety the latter's plan, whose simplicity was its only virtue.

Pearl had determined that, come what may, Kung was going to provide her with some costly jewellery. With that as the firm basis of the plan, she had talked the matter over with her brother who, in brotherly fashion, had offered to help. He argued, and with reason, that if Kung did not come up to scratch, a staged robbery would leave this distinguished man with the legal and moral responsibility for the return of the jewels, or their value, to Lok-wen. More than all this, Pearl's venal brother argued, for Kung to be robbed thus in a house protected by the chop of the Society would, if generally known, cause him a great loss of face. Kung's anxiety, therefore, would be to hush the matter up and pay whatever Lok-wen demanded. The essential detail of the plan was that the loss of the jewels be advertised as Pearl's loss, not Kung's. " Thus," said her brother, " when Kung has paid Lok-wen, we will arrange that the jewels shall be found. All Shanghai will know that they are yours. Kung, therefore, having stated to save his face that they are yours, will be unable to claim them. I, your brother, because of my great love for you, will so arrange matters."

Seen thus, the plan looked quite foolproof to Pearl, but in coming to this conclusion she forgot that a plan, like a chain, is as strong as its weakest link, which in the case of this plan, was her own brother.

Pearl's brother had his plan also. His was even more simple than his sister's. He had already told his accomplice that the evening's work was no more than an elaborate joke at the expense of his sister. With the jewels safely in his possession, therefore, he would tell his accomplice that he was about to return them to put an end to the joke. This would save the necessity of sharing the proceeds of the theft. He would then make tracks for Hongkong and, when the hue and cry had died down somewhat, sell the jewels and live happily ever

afterwards on the proceeds. He was sure that Kung would not wish for any undue publicity and would pay rather than endure the loss of face entailed. It was obvious that if all Shanghai were to know of the matter, Kung and the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society could be swept away by the gusts of laughter which would ensue.

While he was about it, and to make the robbery more realistic, Pearl's brother took not only the jewels brought on approval by Lok-wen, but all the jewels belonging to his sister as well. This, as he was to discover later, was a very foolish thing to have done. In the first place, because Pearl's own jewels were insured with the Shanghai General Insurance Company, he introduced into the picture new factors. In the second place, by this wanton and unbrotherly act, he lost his sister as an ally.

It was six o'clock in the morning when Pearl's maidservant, returning from a night of dalliance with the cashier of a restaurant patronised by her employer, gave the alarm by screaming loudly through the open window. A Chinese detective named Chang, lurking in the vicinity on some other business, answered the alarm. When he had removed the bags from the heads of Kung and Pearl, both of whom he recognised at once, he asked the questions which might be expected from a diligent policeman. Pearl remained amazingly calm for a few minutes until she discovered her brother's perfidy. When she realised that all her own jewellery had disappeared, her cries rent the still morning air.

"What was the value of your own jewels?" asked the detective.

"Over two hundred thousand dollars!" wailed Pearl in reply, going on to describe the pieces in detail and multiplying their value by about ten.

"There has been no robbery," said Kung calmly. "This young person is overwrought."

Pearl's reply, freely translated into colloquial English, was: "Overwrought, my Aunt Fanny!" To which the detective's reply similarly translated, was: "Now make up your minds. What *is* this?"

"We will discuss this matter elsewhere," said Kung, leading the detective into another room and closing the door. From

beneath his gown Kung fumbled for a wallet, and extracting from it a banknote for $100, handed it to the detective. "There has been no robbery, do you understand? The young person is mistaken."

"There has been no robbery," the detective repeated parrot fashion, "and since there has been no robbery, there is nothing to detain me."

"Nothing at all," agreed Kung amiably. "Remember that well and, if you will visit me at my humble home a few days hence, another note for a like amount will be there waiting for you."

Within Kung there was rising a great tide of anger against some unknown malefactors who had dared thus to humiliate him, but before steps were taken to find and punish them, it was essential that Pearl's lamentations be quietened. The loss —Kung gritted his teeth with rage—would have to be made good. Lok-wen would make sure of that, for the asking price of the jewels he had left in Kung's custody was somewhat more than $250,000. Pearl herself would have to wait for the return of her own jewels.

It was some little while before the girl's rage calmed sufficiently for her to understand what was said, but at length she agreed that she would keep her mouth closed regarding the loss, relying upon Kung's promise that all would be restored to her. Kung, thus reassured, hastened to the house by the river, where, within minutes of his arrival, the wheels had been set in motion to find and capture the thieves. Little enough was known about them, for Kung could say no more than that there were, he believed, two of them and that they were young and strong.

* * * * *

In the absence of any reliable statement, rumours began to circulate in Shanghai. The one which obtained general credence was that Pearl had been robbed of jewels worth over one million dollars and that Kung, whom the robbers had found in her bed, had also suffered great losses. It was nearly noon when the rumour reached the ears of an exceedingly bright and active young man named Young, who was by profession an insurance broker and through whom Pearl had insured all her jewels.

At roughly the same time the rumour reached the ears of Quong, the compradore of the Shanghai General, the company which had insured the risk. Now Quong's large experience of insurance had taught him that insured persons who suffered a loss were not slow to make a claim. Since no word of a claim had reached him, he was inclined to discount the rumour. Discreet inquiries of the police confirmed that no such robbery had taken place, or that if it had taken place, it had not been reported. Since there was a clause in the policy which imposed on the insured person the duty of reporting any loss to the police with all speed, Quong kept his thoughts to himself. If it were not reported very soon, the company's liability would be questionable.

Young, the insurance broker, who had learned his business in San Francisco, where he had been a member of the Chinese community, wasted no time in seeking out Pearl.

"What is this I hear about the loss of all your jewels?" he asked, coming to the point with less than oriental abruptness.

"What jewels?" asked she in reply.

"The jewels you insured through me, of course. What other jewels could I be speaking of?"

"There was no robbery," said Pearl, having been coached by Kung to say this and nothing else.

"That I will not believe until you show them to me. If there has been a robbery—and I am almost sure there has been—if it has not been reported to the police, then let me tell you that the company will refuse to pay the claim. I suspect that you are not telling me the truth, although I come as your friend. Tell me the truth—now, and I *may* be able to make the company pay. But I must know now."

Young's solicitude was founded upon the hope of touching a percentage of the claim if the company should pay. Without knowing it, he had placed Pearl on the horns of a dilemma. There was no certainty in her mind that Kung would secure the return of the jewels and the thought of losing them, and without any compensation, suddenly became too horrible to be contemplated.

A few seconds later Pearl was pouring into Young's receptive ears a fairly circumstantial story of the robbery, omitting

only the part played by her brother, who, it is hardly necessary to add, had not put in an appearance.

"But why did you say when I asked that there had been no robbery?"

"Because," she replied bitterly, "I am a little fool."

Fifteen minutes later Young, with the tearful Pearl in tow, was repeating the story to the inspector in charge at the Louza Police Station, a couple of hundred yards distant.

"Why did you wait seven hours to report this matter?" asked the officer.

"She was too upset and frightened by the robbers," was Young's glib reply. "Besides, as she has told you, a detective was on the spot. Why did he not report the matter?"

"That is what I intend to find out," was the ominous reply; "that is to say, if there was a detective. You say also that much valuable jewellery, the property of Lok-wen, was stolen from Kung. It is very strange. The matter will be investigated."

Having done this, Pearl now became very frightened—more frightened of Kung than of the police, for the latter did not use such long words.

Another fifteen minutes later Willoughby, who did not know quite what to make of the matter, was speaking on the telephone to Gordon Burnside. Having confirmed that Pearl's jewels were insured and that Lok-wen also had a policy with the Shanghai General, under which thus far he had not claimed, a discreet chat with the wealthy jeweller was indicated.

"Why should I make a claim?" asked Lok-wen. "Even if there were a robbery—which I doubt—the jewels were not stolen from me. The value? There is no secret about that. Jewels worth somewhat more than a quarter of a million dollars were left with the respected Kung on approval. If robbers took them from him, the loss is his, and it is for him to report the matter to the police. Doubtless he will do so—if he was robbed."

"I am not so sure of that," replied Willoughby, who realised at once the position in which Kung found himself.

The next and obvious avenue of inquiry was Kung himself. This, in view of their relationship, Willoughby decided, could

not be left to a subordinate, so he ordered a rickshaw puller to take him to the house by the river. Kung, suave and courteous as ever, received him at once.

"I hope," he said with a smile, "that your visit means that I can be of some service to you. Our alliance makes this a pleasure, no less than a duty."

"Mr Kung," said Willoughby, cutting through the courtesies abruptly, "I hear curious stories about you and—certain losses you have sustained. I felt it only right to come to you at once."

"Would you be kind enough to particularise?" asked Kung, who wanted to know just how much the other knew.

Willoughby repeated the story as it had reached him, omitting only the part played by the real or unreal Chinese detective. "I would like to hear from your lips, Mr Kung, whether the story is true or not."

"There was no robbery, Mr Willoughby. As I understand these matters, for a robbery to be established there must be a complainant. There is no complainant. Therefore there is no robbery."

"But there is a complainant, Mr Kung. The girl known as Pearl has reported the robbery. Furthermore, she has claimed against an insurance company, giving details of her losses and mentioning yours."

"She will withdraw the statement, Mr Willoughby. She will also renounce the claim against the insurance company. If there was any loss, it will be borne by me."

"It isn't as simple as that, Mr Kung. The girl has lodged a signed statement with the police. If it were pure fabrication —and I don't think it was—she can be severely punished."

"But think of her youth, Mr Willoughby. She is a mere child, not yet sixteen years of age. . . ."

"Then," said Willoughby, deep disapproval in his voice, "if she is a mere child, as you say, why do you not treat her as such? She is a child for one purpose, it seems, and a woman for another. . . ."

Here was just one more of the many points where men of the West—the fastidious ones—could not find a common ground with the men of the East. Since his arrival in China Willoughby had been appalled by the traffic in mere children, girls three

and more years younger than Pearl. Human vultures visited famine areas all over China to buy, sometimes for a few cents apiece, young girls who otherwise would have starved to death. They brought them to Shanghai and the other great centres where, in the evil jargon of the trade, they were sold as "first-time pieces" to wealthy men who in a lifetime bought scores and even hundreds of them, discarding them after a few days and leaving them to their fate. There were, as Willoughby knew only too well, Europeans and Americans, some of them so important that they were almost beyond the reach of the law, who bought in the same market. He knew that these matters were regarded differently in China, just as he knew that Pearl, like most of her kind, was completely amoral, but he could not bring himself to condone the situation which confronted him.

Kung and Willoughby faced each other. Their eyes seemed to lock. The knowledge each had of the other's race accentuated, rather than minimised, the gulf which divided them.

"You were saying something," said Kung, breaking a silence which was becoming too tense. "Pray continue."

"I don't think," said Willoughby almost viciously, "that I have anything more to say. My thoughts are better left unsaid."

"I will not be so stupid," said Kung, "as to pretend that I do not take your meaning. Let me for a moment borrow what you call Western bluntness and what we Chinese call Western uncouthness. Some of us go so far as to call it barbarism. I allowed you to speak. Courtesy demanded it. You allowed your undisciplined Western mind to stray along paths which, even if they concern you, you do not understand. Your ancestors, if you know anything about them, which I take leave to doubt, were possibly grooming horses when mine were riding them. Your ancestors were cringing to laws when mine were making laws . . . and you, a foreigner, because the steel-yards of your country can make guns and ships and machines, which we Chinese despise because they are the refuge of insecure souls who pin their faith on brute force, dare to criticise by implication customs which have endured since

the time when your unknown ancestors were deeply rooted in savagery.

"To me, Mr Willoughby, your attitude is not only impertinent; it is pitiable. You have spent more than twenty years here in Shanghai and you know so little of us that you dare to judge us by the narrow standards of a land which has never had to face the problems of China. You think of me—it is written on your face now—as a degenerate man who takes pleasure only in despoiling youth and innocence. I owe you no explanation, Mr Willoughby, but none the less I will give you one. It may help you to understand a little better the land in which you have pitched your tent briefly.

"Since my beloved wife died women have played no part in my life. It may well be that no woman will. But whether or not, the question of morality—the cheap veil behind which you Westerners hide your inadequacy—does not arise. I am a man with important work to do. If I cannot do that work as it should be done because I am tortured by the urges of the flesh, what matters it whether I, or another, pluck the flower?

"You Westerners profess to worship virginity, forgetting that virginity is something negative—the mere absence of sexual life. We Chinese demand virginity in a bride, but that is because we prefer to have exclusive rights in our women. Virginity in itself is less than nothing, for it is the absence of something. It can be innocence. Equally it can be ignorance. Night is the absence of light; silence is the absence of song; and death, what is it but the absence of life? The so-called moral standards of your insecure civilisation are maintained by prurient-minded hypocrites, castrates, sexless old women and professional witch-doctors. They are founded upon negation, a refusal to face the only facts which matter.

"Do you not realise that here in China we are down to earth? Are your sensibilities so blunt that you cannot feel the struggle for survival all around you, a struggle fiercer than anywhere else on earth? There has never been a year in recorded history when we Chinese were not the losers in the battle with starvation. Because of our numbers, our problem is so vast as to be almost cosmic. Flood, famine and pestilence—take these in any order—have been the crucible in which Chinese character

has been moulded. Each generation has learned its lesson at a cost of not less than fifty million lives. We do not have to guess any more, Mr Willoughby, because we *know*. Through the veil of suffering we have already glimpsed the eternal verities and we have learned to be humble. . . .

"Our civilisation, you are thinking, is rotten. For once you are right, Mr Willoughby. It *is* rotten, as a manure heap is rotten. One civilisation dies and falls into decay, so that another may spring from the corruption. It has happened to us many times. It has not happened to you—yet, because your civilisation has not yet even reached maturity. If yours, or any other civilisation on earth, had to face the difficulties which we face—the mass starvation, the cruel rivers, the conflict of tongues—there would be chaos. You would not have time then to sentimentalise about the sterile beauties of virginity, for you would have learned that it is better for a flower to become a full-blown flower, however brought about, than to be cheated of its destiny.

"I am being very vehement, Mr Willoughby, because in order to make you understand I must descend to your level—intellectually. In polite society in China it is considered ill-mannered—merely another name for immature—to express opinions too forcibly. You fall into the common error, because we prefer to cultivate a calm and impassive exterior, of believing that we have no feelings. But you are wrong, Mr Willoughby, so terribly wrong that, if you could but see the truth, you would tremble with fear. If you could but read in the minds of the Chinese people around you the searing contempt in which you —not you personally, for many of us respect certain qualities in you—are held, you would be very humble. You would not then waste your time in trying to civilise people whose earliest essays in civilisation, several thousand years before yours began, were higher than anything you have yet achieved. All you have is machines and a host of borrowed philosophies which, at best, you have only half digested. You do not even understand the true inwardness of the Christ, by the essence of whose teachings we were already living more than five centuries before Christ himself was born. . . . I suppose as a host who has been exceedingly discourteous, I should apologise to you.

But I am going to forget my good manners to-day, for in all probability my rudeness has not penetrated your consciousness. Why, therefore, should my apologies be any the more successful of their purpose?"

"Have you finished, Mr Kung?" asked Willoughby, who had listened in silence to this tirade. "Perhaps, if you have you will explain to me, from the lofty pinnacles of your superior civilisation, just where this is leading us. You do not, it seems, like our Western habits. Then why choose to live in the International Settlement? Why, since you live here, flaunt our laws? The great Dr Sun held opinions similar to yours in many ways. He told us foreigners that we were interlopers, but he did not hesitate to shelter behind Western power when his own country wanted him for illegal activities. . . ."

"You ask where this is leading us. I will tell you. I once asked you to be my ally; I no longer ask it. Your presence here is a threat. I reply with a threat and a warning. Do not interfere with me, Mr Willoughby. I could have been a loyal friend and ally. I can be a very dangerous enemy. If you are ever foolish enough to allow a trial of strength to develop between us, you will regret it—always. Do not construe this as a threat of violence, for I will never be violent where you are concerned. My weapons are far more powerful than mere brute force. Have you ever heard the mocking laughter of thousands—directed at you, Mr Willoughby? It is not a pretty sound. It eats into a man's soul, helping him to realise his own utter unimportance. It is a sour dish. I hope for your sake that you will not have to eat it . . . and now, if you will excuse me, I have important matters requiring my attention. Good day, Mr Willoughby!"

Willoughby hardly listened to the latter part of his host's tirade. He heard the words, but they beat vainly on his ears. His mind was occupied with other matters. If it came to open hostility between Kung and himself—and this now seemed likely—he would need every weapon in the armoury, for Kung could be a most dangerous enemy.

As he left the room Willoughby gave one final sniff. A keen nose—and he was sure he was not mistaken—had put into his hands a potent weapon. It was not the kind of weapon he

chose to use. He would not, he determined, use it except in case of dire necessity, but there was comfort in the reflection that if the occasion arose, the weapon which a keen nose had put into his hands was a decisive one. But even as he bade Kung a cold farewell, Willoughby was uncomfortably aware of his reluctance to use it.

CHAPTER VII

One of the chief reasons why the profession of law has always flourished mightily, almost regardless of economic trends which affect the fortunes of the majority, is that wrong-doers are for the most part somewhat stupid. An intelligent man who contemplates running foul of the law consults his legal adviser *before* rather than *after* the event, just as upon arriving in a strange city he would inquire the way before making a street-by-street search for his destination.

Kung, being an intelligent man, spent the greater part of the day closeted with Dr Soong-li who, in addition to being a barrister of the Inner Temple, was generally conceded to be the best legal brain in Shanghai, regardless of nationality. Much of his success was due to a cold, concise mind in which there was no room for little human weaknesses such as sympathy and prejudice. Dr Soong-li had an encyclopædic knowledge of law and human nature. With this equipment he was a formidable opponent and a valuable ally, in recognition of which Shanghai's most successful crooks—the only ones who could afford his fees—paid him annual retainers in order to ensure that when Nemesis appeared upon the scene Dr Soong-li would deal with the situation. When, as sometimes happened, he had been retained by both sides to a dispute, and was debarred by legal etiquette from appearing for either, he functioned in the rôle of arbitrator.

It was symptomatic of this New China that Kung and Dr Soong-li, during their long consultation, spoke both Mandarin Chinese and English, of which both were masters. The former lent itself to inexact things, where fine shades of meaning were needed, while the latter was the language of precision.

"You are adopting a highly dangerous course," Dr Soong-li was saying. "You are threatening the West at its most sensitive

spot, for you are striking at Money. The West will endure the murder of its citizens and will devise a save-face formula to allow escape with dignity from the situation, but when you strike at the large financial institutions, which are the bastions of the West and the mainspring of its policies, you are inviting trouble. The great insurance companies are Money in its most highly concentrated and powerful form. . . ."

"If only they would see it," Kung interrupted, "I am their best friend."

"You are less wise than I believed you to be," continued the lawyer. "Countries like the United States and Great Britain, and other highly industrialised parts of the world, have at their disposal the means to eliminate almost totally the dangers of fire in their great cities. By expending a very small fraction of the amounts now expended in fire insurance premiums, fire-fighting men and equipment could be concentrated in such a fashion as to make fire for the ordinary citizen a negligible risk. Why, do you suppose, this has not been done? Who, think you, are its chief opponents? It is more profitable for the great fire insurance companies that the means of fire-fighting should be so efficient that great conflagrations cannot sweep away whole cities—which would be disastrous—and yet so inefficient that the private citizen will not dare to bear the risk himself

"You, my friend, if you had your way, would abolish theft and robbery and house-breaking in this city. As you very rightly believe, the best form of insurance against such crimes is to relieve the necessities of the unfortunate and divert their activities into other and more honest channels. Crime of this kind does not arouse the moral indignation of the West until it upsets the balance. Too much thieving of all kinds makes insurance an unprofitable undertaking, for there is a strict limit to the raising of premiums. There comes into operation what is called the Law of Diminishing Returns. Faced with the payment of exorbitant premiums, the ordinary citizen may find it cheaper and more effective to put better bolts and bars on his house and to buy a shotgun. Too little thieving, likewise, is unprofitable for the converse reason, for the fears of the ordinary citizen may be lulled to the point where he believes

insurance to be unnecessary. The point at which insurance remains a highly profitable undertaking is nicely balanced between these two extremes. Disturb that balance, if you will, but be prepared to take the consequences.

"The Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society, provided its aims are not achieved too well, can still make friends with Western financial institutions, but it can only do so while there is enough crime to make it possible for the latter to continue to levy tribute upon the people. Thus are balances preserved."

"But it is they and not I, as they allege, who are accomplices of criminals!" exclaimed Kung with indignation, forgetting his usual calm and dispassionate demeanour in the presence of a calmer and more dispassionate individual.

"You know that to be the truth and so do I, my friend," observed the lawyer. "They know it to be the truth in these rock-like institutions whose integrity is never questioned. But, I think you will agree, it is less than tactful to remind them of the fact. Have you not yet learned one great lesson about the West? The West laughs at our Chinese devotion to face, but, no less than ourselves, the West is obsessed with face. Almost every act of the Westerner, from the struttings and the pompous pretences of high morality to the foolish waste of money in order to impress others, are the manifestations of Western face. We call it by its right name: they call it dignity, prestige and a dozen other save-face names. But it is still face. The gulf which is said to divide the East from the West is not so wide as many people believe. The East and the West see in each other mirrored characteristics and, because they do not like what they see, they go on widening the gulf which barely existed when they first began to meet each other two or three centuries ago.

"It has been a slow process, my friend. It began when Christians from the West—people who called themselves Christians but ignored the teaching of their Christ—came to our land and observed with horror and indignation a civilisation which, without any knowledge of Christ, had reached a higher plane than any Christian land. They set out from that hour to destroy what they saw, because it shattered their complacency

—caused them to *lose face*. They are not very sure of the superiority which they assert so loudly, but they are strong where we are weak. Walk very softly, my friend, or you will unchain a tiger whose ferocity will appal you. You may do what you will with these Western barbarians, so long always as you do not touch their money-bags."

"I will keep your counsel before me, friend Soong. That it is wise I do not doubt, but it sticks in my gullet that here in our own land we must conform to the ways of the upstart Western civilisation. Nothing you have said has turned me from my purpose, but with your advice I will be very careful as to method. There is always a way round any law that the wit of man can advise, so rest assured that with your help I shall remain strictly within the law, excepting always the occasions when this is not practicable. Then I will walk very softly. . . ."

* * * * *

The crowd of newspaper men had waited many hours outside the house by the river in the hope that Kung would emerge, but just as their patience was coming to an end a messenger came out to invite them inside.

"To what do I owe this honour and pleasure?" asked Kung when they were seated.

"There is a rumour," said one of them who acted as spokesman for all, "that you suffered a great loss by robbery. We are come to hear from your own lips whether this is true and, if it is true, to learn the details."

"The rumour has not reached my ears yet. Doubtless it will, but it would save time if you will be so kind as to repeat it to me."

The spokesman thereupon recited a surprisingly accurate summary of what had in fact occurred.

"I can only reply to you," said Kung at length, "that no property of mine has to the best of my knowledge been stolen."

"But they say," persisted the newspaper man, "that the jewels stolen were the property of Lok-wen, left in your custody for approval."

"As to any property of the respected Lok-wen, it would not

be proper for me to express an opinion. I suggest that you refer your questions to him."

"We have already done that, but Lok-wen insists that he has suffered no loss. . . ."

"Then, as Lok-wen is known far and wide as an honourable and truthful merchant, why should you question the truth of his statements?"

"The girl Pearl, what of her?" asked another of the group. "What of her jewels?"

"Again, I can only suggest that you ask her . . ."

"We cannot find her. There is a rumour that you know where she is."

"I assure you that I do not know," said Kung coldly, speaking the literal truth, for at his orders she had been spirited away, but where she was at that moment he did not know.

"The insurance company says that a claim has been made . . ."

"Then surely there is your best source of information? If the insurance company is reticent, why not try the police? With their well-known efficiency you may be sure they know everything. . . ."

"It is said that the police contemplate taking action against you for the suppression of evidence. Is that true?"

"Gentlemen, as I am not a clairvoyant, your question is beyond my poor powers to answer. As to what is in the mind of our estimable police, your guess is fully as good as mine . . . and now, if you will excuse me, gentlemen, I am very busy."

The mixed gathering of Chinese and foreign newspaper men withdrew with the best grace it could muster. An English language morning newspaper carried the following day a story which was substantially true, implying bluntly that Kung had been caught in embarrassing circumstances and was bearing the loss himself rather than endure the resultant loss of face if the truth were known. The same morning, on Kung's behalf, Dr Soong-li instituted proceedings for libel. The newspaper, in the person of its editor, protested verbally, before even referring the matter to its lawyers, that the offending item had been published on the strength of a statement made by Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby.

"Then," said Dr Soong-li at once in his most agreeable

manner, "if you will publish a retraction in terms to be agreed and will furnish me with a sworn statement by your reporter that he published in good faith what he had been told, proceedings will be stopped at once. I assure you that my client, Mr Kung, has no desire to be vindictive. The account published by you tends to show him in a very poor light, but an adequate retraction will ensure that his reputation suffers no serious injury."

The newspaper, which was already in a shaky financial condition, complied with these conditions.

That same day, and with considerable difficulty, Dr Soong-li made an appointment to see Willoughby at the Central Police Station.

"You have made a highly damaging statement about my client, Mr Kung," said the lawyer, launching into the purpose of his visit with Western bluntness. "You have accused him in effect of compounding a serious felony, of being an immoral person and a seducer of a young girl. He is in a position to claim heavy damages from you, Mr Willoughby, damages, which would ruin you, unless, of course, you are in a position to prove your allegations. In that event, Mr Willoughby, I am sure that your own legal advisers would urge you to fight. But"—he leaned forward in his chair—"can you prove them, Mr Willoughby?"

"Probably I cannot, Dr Soong," replied Willoughby heavily, "for I have no doubt that Kung will find perjured witnesses to prove that he was hundreds of miles away . . ."

"That, Mr Willoughby, is a highly slanderous statement. Happily for you, I think we may call this a privileged occasion. Nevertheless, your attitude is not—very helpful."

"Out with it, man! What do you want?"

"I am instructed by my client to deliver to you a message. He will wait one week in order to give you a fair opportunity to prove the damaging allegations you have made regarding his character. If at the end of a week you have, as an honest man, found that these allegations are unfounded and utterly without truth and are prepared to make a handsome withdrawal, he will, because of his great personal regard for you, forget the matter. . . ."

"And if I don't?"

"We shall be under the regrettable necessity of making you substantiate them—in court. The consequences of failure, I need hardly remind you, would be—disastrous."

"Good day, Di Soong!" said Willoughby, rising to open the door.

"Believe me, Mr Willoughby, my client will be distressed beyond measure if you force him to take extreme measures."

"Good day, Mr Soong; you're breaking my poor bloody little heart!"

Willoughby had an idea, which he put into effect immediately his visitor had left. "Find out for me," he told an assistant, "whether in the last forty-eight hours any Chinese detective in the Louza district has been taken ill suddenly, or has for any reason had to go off duty."

Before Willoughby left his office there was a report on his desk to the effect that a certain Detective Chang of the Louza district had been called suddenly to Soochow, where his father was believed to be dangerously ill. Further inquiries revealed the fact that Detective Chang, at the time of the supposed robbery of Pearl's house, had been watching premises some fifty yards distant where, according to reports received, large-scale gambling was taking place. "I'll bet you a month's pay—yours against mine—that Detective Chang is off the roll of the Shanghai Municipal Police—for ever," said Willoughby to his assistant.

"Bet me your year's pay against my day's pay," was the reply, "and because I'm half-witted I'll take the bet."

Three days later Willoughby, after having combed Shanghai with the proverbial fine tooth-comb, found himself in an astounding position. Although by now Kung's infatuation for the girl Pearl was a matter of common gossip, there could not be found, anywhere in Shanghai, one single human being able or willing to state positively that Kung even knew her. The maid, like her employer, had gone. Lok-wen, asked point-blank whether he had or had not left valuable jewellery with Kung at Pearl's house, replied:

"Mine is a business in which the highest discretion is necessary. When transactions have been completed, I no longer remember them."

"But," protested Willoughby, "this is a matter of crime. You can be forced to speak."

"If any person is accused of a crime," replied Lok-wen, "doubtless there will be a trial. If at the trial my evidence is required, doubtless the necessary papers will be served to summon me to the court."

As Willoughby knew only too well, there was no accused. There had been no robbery. As there had been no robbery and therefore no complaint, there was little likelihood of a trial. There were no means at hand, it followed, to make Lok-wen speak if he preferred to remain silent.

Willoughby wished he had not been so free with accusations for to substantiate them was quite impossible. However, two could play the game of disappearing witnesses, and if it came to a showdown, Kung's case would have no chance of success against Willoughby unless the reporter who had quoted him could be produced in court. Fire had to be fought with fire.

Whether the libel case ever came to court or not, Kung had gained a signal victory. Shanghai had been prepared to laugh at Kung, the Prince of the Thieves, as some called him, for his position, if the robbery had ever been aired in public, would have been grotesquely humiliating. But now, having extricated himself cleverly and turned the tables, Shanghai was prepared to laugh with him.

Willoughby knew that upon himself now depended his future career. If it came to open warfare with Kung, anything might happen. To lose more face in a battle of wits would be to cut short a long and honourable service. The door was still open if he wanted to come to terms with Kung, but he wanted a little time to think.

The Westerner who wants to live happily in the East must learn, as one of his first lessons, how to compromise gracefully. The West is prone to accentuate the cleavage between pure white and dead black, while the East is more prone to accept the hundreds of intermediate shades. On grounds of logic and expediency, if not of strict morality, the Eastern conception of the problems of life tends to be the more realistic of the two. Willoughby had learned this lesson early and had ever since fought an inner struggle with the two conceptions. Here, he

sensed, was a situation which would not only determine his future career, but, more important, set the final seal upon his own character.

The position was complicated for Willoughby by a genuine liking and admiration for Kung, whose qualities, by any standards, were good, but who was by Western standards none the less a most dangerous man.

Kung, it was soon apparent, did not intend to allow the detective much time for reflection.

* * * * *

He is a bold man who, in the complicated age which has dawned upon the world, will state positively that any two events, wherever they may occur, and whatever their nature, are unrelated.

Several thousand miles from Shanghai, in Weltevreden, the very pleasant residential district of Java's capital, a portly Chinese merchant who, in this equatorial climate, would have found a sable coat an insupportable burden, was taking the air beside the *Kali Besar*, the turgid creek which bisects the city. With him was a Cantonese body-servant, remarkable only for a cast in one eye. It was the last walk these two were destined ever to take together, or even singly. It was a dark night and the hour was late, so there was nobody to see when four figures, lurking behind trees, interrupted this peaceful stroll.

There were two loud splashes, and silence. In the morning, when the bodies were found by a Javanese policeman, he was astonished that two men, one of them young and active, could have drowned in this shallow creek. He understood the matter better when he discovered that their feet were bound together with wire and that round the neck of each was tied a sack full of stones.

Some time between sunset and sunrise thieves entered the house of this portly merchant, removing certain valuable but unspecified property.

Some three weeks after these events every newspaper in Shanghai received an anonymous telephone call. "If you will send a reporter to the offices of the Shanghai General Insurance

Company at 11 a.m. exactly," said the message, "you will find an interesting story."

At 10.50 a.m. the assembled reporters had resigned themselves to a hoax. Nothing of the slightest interest seemed to be occurring. None of them noticed a wheelbarrow coolie who struggled to pull his laden vehicle over the kerb in an effort to reach the main entrance of the company's office. At last, however, he succeeded. He then set to work to unload the wheelbarrow, removing from it certain heavy bales addressed clearly to Mr Gordon Burnside. When he had done this, the coolie left the place without hurry and was soon lost in the maelstrom of traffic on The Bund.

"I wonder," said a reporter three minutes later, "what's in those bales. It may be that someone has planted a bomb there."

"Who'd be such a damned fool as to try to kill newspaper men with a bomb?" asked a voice thick with the fogs of Clydeside. "It's much cheaper to starve them to death. All the same, I wouldn't be surprised if those bales contained a story. They're addressed to Burnside. Let's get him to open them"

Fifteen minutes later the Shanghai General Insurance Company was some two million dollars richer than it had been when it opened its doors that morning, for the bales contained, intact down to the last item, the proceeds of the robbery at the Yangtszepoo Road godown, on which the company had already paid the claim. Everyone would have been satisfied if only murdered men could have been brought to life—everyone, that is, except the Shanghai Police, who quite obviously had had nothing to do with the return of the stolen property and to whose reputation, therefore, no lustre had been added.

That anyone could have connected this amazing occurrence with the finding of the portly Chinese merchant and his servant in a creek in Java was quite unthinkable, even in the unlikely event that anyone in Shanghai knew of the tragedy.

Willoughby, to whose ears the matter was soon brought, had occasion to reflect that if he had made his peace with Kung those same bales would have been put, and without publicity,

somewhere where he could have found them. It was especially unfortunate, too, that the publicity came on the eve of the postponed trial of the twenty-two robbers and murderers, due to open at the International Mixed Court on the morrow. Interest was added to the case by a last-minute announcement that the defence had been undertaken by Dr Soong-li, which Willoughby was at liberty to interpret as he pleased.

When he awoke at six o'clock on the morning of the trial, Willoughby had an uneasy feeling that all was not well, He was not one of those men who believes himself psychic, but he had what he called a policeman's sixth sense. At nine o'clock his worst fears were realised.

"Why the blazes," asked the prosecuting counsel over the telephone, "didn't you let me have the papers on the case as I asked? I've got to be in court in an hour. . . ."

"The papers were taken to your office last night," replied Willoughby. "The receipt for them is on my desk with your signature on it."

"Then it's a forgery, because I wasn't at my office last night and I didn't sign any receipt."

There was not, Willoughby realised, going to be very much time for reflection. Within an hour he must decide whether to fight Kung, or to compromise. There was not the least doubt in his mind that the disappearance of the papers—which included signed and witnessed confessions—was Kung's work. He was equally sure, furthermore, that to attempt to prove what he knew to be true would be futile. He began to realise for the first time what a formidable opponent Kung could be and, conversely, what a useful ally. But the price! That was the rub. The price of Kung's friendship was going to be self-respect, honour, truth, duty and all the other things which, in Willoughby's uncomplicated philosophy, added up to self-respect again. With Kung as an active ally, he might go down to history as a detective beside whom the legendary Sherlock Holmes, and all the other detectives of imaginative fiction, would look like novices. The vista was tempting as he contemplated it, but one of the qualities which had enabled Willoughby to rise from pavement-pounding in an uninspiring English manfacturing town to his present well-paid eminence,

had been the ability to resist temptation, of which there had never been any lack.

In his desk was a little black notebook in which he had inscribed carefully over the years every bribe which had been offered to him since he first arrived in Shanghai. It was more than five years since the whim had seized him to total the sum, which even then had been dazzling. He still kept the little book accurately as satisfying evidence, merely for his own use, that he had done his duty in the sober decent way which was an Englishman's obligation in a foreign land. He had plodded to his goal rather than leaped there by seven-league-boots flashes of genius. There had been times when he had blundered. Not many, but enough. Now he knew the next hour was going to decide how much longer he would keep the self-respect which was his most cherished possession.

In addition to self-respect, twenty-two human lives were at stake. Worse, for if there were no evidence to convict them, twenty-two human tigers would be turned loose again to prey on society.

"Get me Dr Soong-li on the telephone," Willoughby told a clerk, glancing at his watch, which recorded the passing minutes.

There was no delay. Within a minute the pleasantly modulated voice of the lawyer came over the line. "What can I do for you, Mr Willoughby?" he asked.

"Certain very important papers, as you probably know already, are missing, Dr Soong," said Willoughby softly. "If I do not have them by ten o'clock this morning the consequences may be serious."

"For whom, Mr Willoughby?"

"For me, I fear."

"I am most distressed to hear that, Mr Willoughby."

"I thought you would be, Dr Soong. That is why I telephoned you. Can you suggest—from your wide experience, of course—any method by which those papers might be put in my hands before ten o'clock this morning?"

"I would imagine, Mr Willoughby, that some person must be ill-disposed towards you to have done this thing. It would seem to follow logically, would it not, that if the cause of this

ill-disposition were removed this person might feel disposed to be helpful. . . ."

"But do you think it is possible, Dr Soong, even if the cause were removed that the papers could be restored in time?"

"I feel sure it is, Mr Willoughby," came the lawyer's suave voice.

"Thank you, Dr Soong," said Willoughby, and rang off. He learned what he wanted to learn: that the stolen papers were in Shanghai Thereafter events moved quickly. "Take my place at the Mixed Court," Willoughby told a subordinate. "Get hold of the prosecutor and tell him to stall for time. I'm going to try to find the missing papers. If I fail—well don't let's talk about that"

Willoughby had decided to fight, to preserve his self-respect. The decision made, he was ready to fight with every weapon in the armoury, clean or otherwise. Kung had been a little careless.

In recognition of the fact that certain Chinese, if deprived of the solace of opium, would be in effect condemned to death, a law of the newly-founded Republic had a loophole permitting those who possessed stocks of opium already in their houses to continue to smoke within the law. Transport of such opium, except with special permission, was illegal. If, therefore, in his house by the river, Kung possessed any opium, he was guilty of a serious offence. On his visit to Kung's house Willoughby's keen nose had detected the unmistakable acrid smell of opium smoke. By bribing a house-servant he had learned, furthermore, that Kung was an addict of long standing. He did not traffic in the drug, but from the time he had lost his wife he had begun to smoke. Now six or eight pipes an evening were necessary to him.

Willoughby, in anticipation of a situation in which an advantage over Kung might be tremendously valuable, had been for some time in possession of a search warrant. If opium were found in the house by the river, which Kung had acquired *since* the Revolution, it followed that it must have been transported there, or acquired from the previous owner. In either case, its possession was illegal. There would, therefore, be justifica-

tion for arresting Kung and holding him without bail. A week without opium would in all probability turn him into a madman.

Motor-cars were not yet universal in Shanghai, so in a procession of horse-drawn vehicles Willoughby, two European detective-inspectors and a score of Chinese detectives sped through the busy streets in the direction of the house by the river. Within seconds of their arrival, every entrance and exit was covered. Kung himself opened the main door.

"Good morning, Mr Willoughby," he said courteously. "This is an unexpected pleasure. To what, may I ask, do I owe it?"

"I have a search warrant, Mr Kung. I intend to search this house thoroughly. Do you wish to see the warrant?"

"No, thank you," replied Kung. "I am quite sure you would not be so very foolish as to search my house if you lacked the proper authority, Mr Willoughby. But would it be indiscreet if I asked for what you are searching? I would be pleased to be helpful"

"You may ask, but I am not bound to reply, Mr Kung. Kindly instruct your servants to assemble in one of the downstairs rooms."

It wanted twenty minute to ten o'clock when the search began. The Chinese detectives, who were all skilled and experienced searchers, had been told to find opium, but they had also been told that Willoughby wanted to see all documents of whatever kind which they might unearth. Mention was made, too, of the singer known as Pearl, or her servant.

A search warrant was an elastic document. It is granted upon a sworn statement that there is reason to believe that something illegal, which must be specified, is upon the premises to be searched. But if in the process of a legal search for opium the documents which had been stolen by a trick were to be uncovered, that would be just so much better. It was Willoughby's private hope that the documents and not opium would be found. He was a humane man—by preference. Furthermore, he believed sincerely that the cause of justice would not be furthered by intrusion upon a man whose private tragedy had caused him to take refuge in opium.

At 10.45 a.m the entire house had been searched from top to bottom and nothing found. There remained only to inspect the contents of a safe let into a wall of a room in Kung's private living quarters.

"If you will give me the key," said Willoughby, "it will save time. If necessary, I will use gelignite"

"If I were to swear to you upon all that I hold most sacred, Mr Willoughby, that what you seek is not in that safe, would you accept my word?" said Kung, who was manifestly greatly disturbed.

"My inclination would be to say no," was the reply, "but before I reply tell me—before witnesses—what it is you think I am looking for."

"I think," said Kung in a soft voice, "that you are searching for certain documents."

"You state positively that the documents which I am seeking are not in that safe?"

"I swear it by all that I hold holy."

"What *is* in the safe?"

"A few pitiful mementoes of my beloved wife, Mr Willoughby, if you must know. The linen from the bed in which she died. The clothes she wore when we were married. The poor jewels it was my joy to give her. A letter she wrote to me on the only occasion I was away from her side after we were married. . . . I do not think you wish to disturb these, Mr Willoughby."

"There is nothing else? You swear it? Not one solitary thing beyond these?"

The two men stood facing each other, eyes locked and all pretences at an end

"Nothing, Mr Willoughby, beyond a few pounds of opium, which are for my private consumption. . . ."

"Wait outside this room!" said Willoughby to his subordinates. "But allow nobody to leave the premises." Turning to Kung, he said: "I do not wish to pry into that safe. I believe you are speaking the truth, because I have never thought of you as a liar. I want from you the papers relating to the trial of the twenty-two robbers and murderers which you caused to be stolen by a trick. I want them within fifteen

minutes. If they are not in my possession in that time, I shall force open the safe, confiscate the opium and arrest you for illegal possession. Furthermore, I shall make it my business to see that while you are in custody you get no opium. You are a better judge than I am of what that will mean to you. I have nothing more to say."

"I wish—more than I can say—that we were friends in the true sense of the word, Mr Willoughby. We could have done so much—together . . ."

"The papers, Mr Kung. There isn't time to talk about might-have-beens," said Willoughby bluntly. "Do I get the papers—now? Or must I use means which I prefer not to use?"

"The papers? Ah, yes, the papers! If you leave now for the Court, Mr Willoughby, taking your men with you, the papers will be there as soon as you are. . . . Leaving aside all personal matters, it is as well that this has happened, for it would have been a pity if these twenty-two depraved men escaped justice. On the day they are executed, Mr Willoughby, let us go out to the execution field together, there to witness the fruits of our co-operation."

Ever since he had opened the door to Willoughby, Kung had worn a gentle, tolerant smile, the kind a doting parent wears as he watches the play of a child. "I trust," he said as the detective left the house, "that the triumphs of the day will not have a bitter taste."

* * * * *

The International Mixed Court was crowded. Murders, however ferocious, seldom attracted any spectators beyond those who were within the Court precincts on other business. Trials had little attraction for the Chinese, if only because procedure at the Mixed Court was so vastly different from that to which they were accustomed, and, perhaps, because there is little sensationalism in the Chinese make-up. Even morbidly-inclined foreigners seldom came this way unless compelled to do so.

Strange rumours had persisted for weeks in Shanghai about this case, and it was because of these that the Court was full.

Thus far, one hour after the Court had convened, the case

had been somewhat of an anti-climax. The time had been occupied by the Prosecutor sparring for time and not doing it very skilfully.

Dr Soong-li, defending the twenty-two men, feeling quite sure of his ability to secure an acquittal for his clients, as instructed by Kung, who was paying his fee, watched the antics of the prosecutor with bored amusement. When the latter, pleading the unavoidable absence of Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby, who had been called out to undertake important duty, asked the Court for a further remand, Dr Soong-li rose in protest. "My clients," he said, "have been in custody for weeks. So far not one jot or tittle of real evidence has been adduced against them, except certain alleged confessions extracted from them by mean which I intend to question. The Prosecution has had ample time in which to formulate specific charges, gather evidence and present its case. If it is not now ~~to-day~~—in a position to do so, there is no warrant in law for holding my clients. I demand their acquittal. Furthermore, in the absence of such evidence, I shall advise my clients to bring civil proceedings for damages against the police for unlawful arrest and detention. My clients are, without exception, decent hard-working men, on whom great hardship has been wrought. . . ."

At this moment two Chinese constables, staggering under the weight of a great pile of papers, pushed their way into the body of the court and dumped the bale on the table in front of the Prosecutor. A moment later a Chinese clerk put a slip of paper into the hand of Dr Soong-li. The message written upon the piece of paper caused that worthy to lose for a few fleeting seconds his customary *sang froid*. It required a great deal to knock the astute lawyer off his balance, and there were many in court who wondered at what they saw.

A moment or so later, after profuse apologies to the Court, Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby took his seat.

The twenty-two men standing in the prisoners' dock did not know it, but the trivial events of the last few moments had sealed their fate. Instead of going out of the court as free men they were going to leave in an iron-barred prison van, as they had come, and in a short while, because they were of no

more value as pawns in the game being played, they were going to kneel before an executioner. All this because Kung, as a grief-stricken widower, had sought solace in opium and now could not live without it.

By mid-afternoon the trial was well advanced, while those experienced in court procedure, especially those who had seen Dr Soong-li in action before, wondered at the perfunctory manner of his defence. Most horrified of these was Willoughby, who had expected a hard fight for conviction. From time to time, sitting among the spectators, he caught sight of Kung, whose frank amusement at his—Willoughby's—mixed feelings was ill concealed. As the principal police officer concerned, he wanted a conviction. As a human being imbued with Western ideas of justice, he stood appalled at Soong-li's callousness and cynicism. Seeing these twenty-two stony-faced wretches facing their doom, Willoughby found it in him to pity them, even though he knew that they richly deserved that doom

On one occasion a detective giving evidence indulged in hearsay. "Since counsel for the defence will not protest against the admission of such evidence," said the British Assessor to the prosecutor, "I must do so for him."

"I did not protest," replied Soong-li brightly, "because I did not consider the evidence of the smallest value and did not wish to waste the time of this Court by petty objections."

An angry murmur ran round the court, but the incident was allowed to pass. When it came to Soong-li to speak for the defence, his was little more than a plea for mitigation. He spoke eloquently enough, but in so perfunctory a manner that Willoughby expected the British Assessor to declare a mistrial on the ground that the accused had not been accorded a proper defence.

At the end of the afternoon the trial ended in the only possible way. The Chinese Judge and British Assessor found the accused guilty of wilful murder. Before sentence of death was passed, however, the British Assessor said coldly: "The guilt of these men is abundantly clear, but even so, I do not consider that their defence has been conducted with the painstaking diligence merited by the gravity of the charge. I would

like to add that in my judgment the work of the police in this case has been above praise. . . ."

Willoughby glanced to the rear of the court-room, where Kung sat smiling ironically. As Willoughby passed him Kung said: "Let me be the first to felicitate you upon your fearlessness and brilliance. All Shanghai will ring with your praises."

Willoughby left quickly, for he did not want to watch twenty-two shackled men led out to die. There was a little moment, just before the end of the trial, when he dearly wanted to say openly what he knew secretly. But because the price was too high he remained silent.

CHAPTER VIII

PEARL OF THE MORNING was weeping. They were not the gentle, reluctant tears of grief, but hot tears of rage which seemed to scald her cheeks as they created little rivulets in the heavy make-up. She should not have been weeping at all, for so many of the ingredients of happiness were hers. There was a walled garden, which sloped gently down to the Grand Canal, having a frontage at a spot where the man-made waterway widened on a great sweeping curve. In the garden, if only Pearl could have forced her angry eyes to see them, were roses of every hue, each one perfect of its kind, for nothing less than perfection was permitted here.

This darling of the Shanghai night-world had merely to clap her hands and her least wish was gratified, always excepting the wish to escape. In case this should cross her mind, there were always two hard-faced men patrolling the garden. They did their work unobtrusively, but with grim efficiency.

The plan, the not-very-good plan, had been somewhat less than brilliantly successful. What was so discomfiting was: firstly, Pearl's inability to discover just where it had failed, because even now she hesitated to believe in her brother's utter perfidy; and secondly, the uncertainty as to just how much Kung knew, or guessed. She had not seen him since immediately after the robbery. Later that day, after she had been talked into making a claim against the insurance company, despite the agreement that there had been no robbery, two men had come to her house to take her, so they said, to Kung. Instead, they had taken her out to Siccawei in a closed carriage. There, beside the bank of a canal, lay a houseboat. On boarding this she had been shut in a small room and had not seen daylight again until the houseboat came to rest at the end of

the rose garden on the banks of the Grand Canal, a few miles out of Soochow.

Now, in the brief intervals between fits of weeping, Pearl knew a growing fear. If only Kung would come and beat her, as she knew she deserved to be beaten, it would all be so much easier. But he did not come.

The servants were all most polite and willing to do anything for her—except answer questions. Had it not been for the fact that Pearl recognised some of the varieties of roses as being identical with those which Kung had brought to her, and which he had said came from his garden near Soochow, she would not even have known where she was.

This little sing-song girl, like every other human being, was the product of her environment and upbringing. When at the age of seven years her aptitude for singing and mimicry had been noted, all else was subordinated to the task of training her for the career which she had adopted. She had grown up to expect a few glittering years in the limelight, followed by a few more years as a rich man's plaything and, when no longer any use for either purpose, a life of ease and luxury on the proceeds. Now, having met the only man in possession of the necessary fortune to whom she felt at all attracted, he was not behaving according to the book. It was absurd that Kung, whose infatuation had been so obvious, having her now in his power, did not come to slake the thirst which obsessed him. Pearl did not particularly wish to be ravished, but having keyed herself to expect such treatment, the anti-climax was too much for her. Besides, it was so insulting, so humiliating. If it were known in Shanghai theatrical circles that she still possessed her virtue intact, she would never be able to hold her head up again for shame.

Pearl's mother had warned her that all men were selfish, and this was proof of it.

Lurking always at the back of Pearl's consciousness was the uncomfortable thought that Kung, if he ever discovered the truth, would not be best pleased about the plan, which had once seemed so excellent. First, of course, she was frightened for herself. Then, when she realised the enormity of his crime, for her erring brother. Ugly things were whispered in Shang-

hai about what happened to those who crossed Kung's path.

She was not enormously fond of her brother, especially after the scurvy way he had treated her, but he was still her brother, and she feared greatly for him. There was so much uncertainty. Why, for instance, was Kung keeping her a prisoner? How much had he discovered? So many questions and so few answers! Above all, where were her own jewels? When she thought of these, tears simply would not be repressed. At these times she hoped that Kung would find out everything. She was prepared to face his anger in order to see some dire punishment fall on her brother.

Instead of soothing her, this lovely garden irritated Pearl. The roses were a constant reminder of Kung's exasperating habit of bringing flowers when all she had wanted was jewels. These last symbolised success, as she understood the word, while flowers, although she ill-understood the reasons, made her feel cheap. All this fuss about mere flowers was quite beyond her. There were three gardeners at work in the garden, all of them old men. The loving care they displayed seemed to Pearl so futile, so pointless, that one day she was impelled to cut several blooms and to tread them into the stone paving of the path with a savage heel. Instead of being angry at this wanton act, the old gardeners looked at her sorrowfully and with genuine pity in their eyes, setting to work at once to tidy the mess she had created. It penetrated Pearl's consciousness at last that here, in a peaceful garden, she was among people who had different values and her inability to understand these values was exasperating.

The house servants, the gardeners, were gravely kind and courteous, not only to her, but among themselves. They performed their simple tasks with the air of people who loved them. The house itself was not richly furnished, but everything was in good taste. There were none of the garish colours to which she was accustomed. Black lacquered furniture was relieved by soft pastel inlays. Some of the cream-coloured silk hangings were yellowed with age. In the principal living-room was a glorious carpet of silk and wool. It was of the palest lettuce green and upon this background, long dead weavers had traced, as though etched in sombre autumn browns

and rusty reds, a grove of poplars. Here and there leaves were fluttering to the ground with such realism that one could almost see them spinning. At first this carpet had enraged Pearl, who favoured screaming scarlets, paddy greens and other violent colour manifestations. To show her contempt she flicked cigarette ash over it, but hardly had the ash fallen than a servant emerged to brush off the least trace. Once she had ground a lighted cigarette-end into the carpet, and for three days thereafter had to endure the humiliation of watching while a patient old man drew threads one at a time from the fringe to repair the damage. It was the unspoken reproach in his eyes whenever they met hers which awakened her to the enormity of her offence.

Pearl was unaccustomed to what in the terms of an overworked phrase may be called gracious living, so the whole atmosphere of this peaceful house and garden was foreign to her. Soft voices fell strangely on ears attuned to raucous crowds. Good manners seemed like a theatrical pose. Delicately-flavoured foods were wasted on a palate rasped by harsh sauces, while all the preoccupation with the care of inanimate things was absurd beyond comprehension. She hardly noticed the carved jade and crystal ornaments, the exquisite patina of old lacquer and ivory and the glorious organ music which came at the least touch from a massive bronze bell.

Pearl was not aware of it, because of a native inarticulacy, but all these things were an affront to her, a reminder of her own uncouth origins, crude tastes and harsh passions, which had left no room for a love of beauty for its own sake. There was only one beauty which Pearl appreciated: that was her own. She was bitterly conscious during these lonely days that it was being wasted upon a rose garden.

* * * * *

Caught up in a web of affairs which threatened to engulf him, Kung was thinking longingly of his rose garden beside the Grand Canal which he saw so seldom these days and which, because his life was so full of uncongenial tasks, he wanted more than ever for the peace it gave him. Kung was beginning to realise that in many ways he was a misfit, an anachronism.

In this chaotic and materialistic Republic his roots lay too deep in the ancient culture of the land for him to be really comfortable. Everywhere around him was a turning away from the old—because it was old—and a frantic acceptance of the new—because it was new. China, it seemed, was now in the hands of smart-aleck products of the Y M C.A., an organisation which had taken away from them, or at least buried below the surface, the wisdom and patience and the forbearance of their ancient land, giving them in exchange a gossamer-thin veneer which had failed utterly to make them Western in outlook, succeeding at best in making them second-rate Eastern. Their pseudo-Christianity had no meaning, but it was enough to make them reject their ancient faith in exchange for the trite patter of the new.

China's ills, or those of them which were curable, dated from the arrival of greedy Westerners in the Flowery Kingdom. Of this Kung was convinced He was too intelligent a man, however, to reject everything Western on that account. Indeed, having imbibed a great deal of Western culture himself, he knew that much of it was valid. As he saw matters, China was suffering from gigantic-scale indigestion from trying to swallow, without chewing, huge doses of Western culture, and lack of culture, too quickly

In founding the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society, Kung had sought to prove to foreigners and those of his own countrymen dazzled by foreign ways, that at least one great Chinese institution was rooted in sanity. The Society he had founded was the logical outcome of the ancient Thieves' Guild, which for countless centuries had been effective in reducing crimes against property to their irreducible minimum. China was the only civilised country on earth in which law and order had been preserved up to that time without the aid of an organised police force The Emperor had always been the father of the nation, delegating his paternal duties all down the line, from provinces to districts, to villages and heads of families, invalidating thus the plea of Cain, who asked: Am I my brother's keeper? Every man in China was his brother's keeper.

The Thieves' Guilds had come into being as a logical recognition of the fact that theft and similar crimes spring from society's

failure to provide adequately for its unfortunates. Every hungry man, because the struggle for survival was man's mainspring, was a potential criminal. Food and shelter given to the hungry was an insurance against crime. The Thieves' Guilds had, therefore, stood as a reasonably effective buffer between the "haves" and the "have-nots", supported obviously by the former. In general the system had worked well, although when, as sometimes happened, the Guilds fell into the hands of unscrupulous men, they became potent levers for extorting blackmail from the community

To Kung, as to most Chinese, the Thieves' Guild was a better solution of the difficulty than the Western combination of police, courts, prisons and insurance companies, for nothing was so sure that, morally, the care of the destitute was the responsibility of those more fortunate. Kung had seen for himself the corruption of the police in many lands and had no illusions on the subject.

Without violent protestations, Kung believed himself to be a patriot and an honest man, fitted therefore to take control of the Society which, with the help of several wealthy and similarly-minded Chinese merchants, he had founded. None knew better than he how the power vested in him could be misused, and, knowing this, he strove to keep as nearly as possible to the line of rectitude in the Society's affairs.

Never, until placed in an impossible position by the theft of the jewels which were the property of Lok-wen, had he diverted to his own use any of the Society's funds. Faced with this position, he had not hesitated to do so. Custom would have sanctioned his taking ten per cent of all he collected, but as Kung saw matters, since he was answerable to nobody but himself, his conduct should be impeccable. Besides, he was a man of simple tastes, with enough money at his disposal to gratify them. Pearl had been the only taste beyond his means which he had cultivated, and, because she was what she was, his inner shame was deep. He deplored the fact that not even his profound culture, his high lineage and his balanced judgment had been able to prevent his life being tangled with hers. Worst of all, the fire of his infatuation still burned brightly.

Whenever he thought of Pearl, Kung became angry, so angry that he dared not yet go to Soochow to see her. It had been a matter of only a few hours' investigation to uncover the plan in all its sordid futility. Pearl's brother had already been located in Hongkong. In a short while he and the stolen jewels would be brought to Shanghai without the help of the police. Then would arise the problem of what to do with him. Kung tried to tell himself that stealing from Kung was no greater crime than stealing from any other person, but he failed to do so very convincingly, for in his heart was an arrogance which made humiliation hard to swallow.

Kung's was an arrogance which fed upon opposition. It grew as he began to realise and assess the forces arrayed against him. It was not so much their power which horrified him. It was their impertinence.

There would never be a widely publicised war between himself, the police of the International Settlement and the vast insurance interests, but it would be war none the less. And it would be because men like Willoughby, Burnside and other insurance moguls, lacked vision and could not understand that his interests were identical with theirs.

Willoughby, Burnside, Pearl and her rascally brother: in Kung's mind they had become little people vainly trying to stop a tidal wave. Even in his anger he could find pity for their stupidity.

While these thoughts were racing through Kung's mind, in the back of which was the ache of longing for the peace of his garden, he was strolling along The Bund. Abreast of the Customs House, he saw Willoughby, obviously very irritated, while a Chinese chauffeur was changing a wheel on a police car. A flat tyre on the other wheel had a shining nail protruding. Kung stood for a while watching the scene, for it made him think of his own problems. Stooping down, he pulled the nail from the cover of the tyre, at the same time turning to Willoughby. "Thus," he observed reflectively, "are great men hindered in their purpose by small and inconsiderable objects and persons. Who could think that the great Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby could be delayed on some high mission by this humble nail?"

"Small things trip up the cleverest of men sometimes, Mr Kung," replied Willoughby meaningly. "It is worth remembering."

"Do you know, Mr Willoughby, I believe I detect in your voice a warning. . . ."

"Mine," said the detective, "was a warning addressed to the world of evil-doers, in which I hope you do not include yourself."

"I claim no perfection," said Kung, smiling, "but I am by nature a most careful man. I will, therefore, remember the small things which trip the cleverest of men. Let us now, however, talk of my humble self. Tell me rather how goes your endless battle against wrongdoers. Well, I trust."

"Against the small wrongdoers, excellently, I am happy to say, but against the larger ones not so well, I fear. Tell me, Mr Kung, how many—er—unfortunates are you feeding now at the house by the river?"

"A bare thousand there, but across the river some four thousand others eat the rice given by the benevolently inclined people of Shanghai, and their number grows."

"The benevolently-inclined people of Shanghai," observed Willoughby, "seem to enjoy a reasonable freedom from the attention of thieves these days, but I hear whispers that many of them find the cost of—er—benevolence somewhat high. Indeed, I have heard this benevolence called by a somewhat uglier and, I fear, more accurate name."

"And the name? This uglier name?"

"The more moderate persons call it extortion. Those less moderate, Mr Kung, call it blackmail. . . ."

"And you, Mr Willoughby, what do you call it?"

"Being just a humble policeman, Mr Kung, it is not for me to give names to things I leave that to the judges. It is they who have the final say in such matters. Which reminds me that many people are wondering what has happened to the girl Pearl, who, strangely, has not been seen in Shanghai since the time a foolish rumour circulated that you and she were robbed of valuable jewels. I find myself wondering whether she left us—voluntarily. If the contrary should transpire, I fear that awkward questions will be asked. While we are on

the subject, Mr Kung, I came across a document only this morning. It concerns you."

"I am flattered, Mr Willoughby. Would it be indiscreet to ask the nature of this document?"

"It is typewritten list, Mr Kung—a list of names. It contains some thirty odd names of various people who knew more about your affairs than was, shall we say, healthy for them. The strange thing is that not one of these people can be found. I try to find them and then, as though by magic, they have disappeared. Furthermore, they disappear at what one may call improbable times. The girl Pearl, for example, is one of them. What persuades a girl like that, enjoying fame and success, to disappear without trace? Amazing, is it not?"

"Permit me to offer you a piece of advice, Mr Willoughby. Do not fence with me. The rapier, believe me, is not your weapon. In your hands it is a mere toy. For you the only effective weapon is the bludgeon—which is so essentially Western. Mark you, I do not under-estimate the power of the bludgeon—even the conversational bludgeon. The pre-eminence of the West proves it efficacy. But as a humble student of history I have noticed that while men have climbed to great power by use of the bludgeon, their triumph has been short-lived. Unless they learn—and quickly—to use the rapier, they so often perish by it. In brief, Mr Willoughby, if you have anything to say to me, say it plainly. My admiration for you shrinks at an alarming rate. Indeed, almost as quickly as my—liking for you."

"You are quite right, Kung," said Willoughby, the absence of the "Mr" striking a harsh note. "I'm not good with the rapier, but I'm the hell of a lot better with the bludgeon than you believe. Curiously, I don't want to have to use it—against you, although I will if necessary. There is an uncomfortable streak of justice in my make-up, and it tells me that you were born fifty years too late. At heart, I believe, you're a reformer. I go further: I believe you are actuated by the highest motives. You said a few moments ago that you were a humble student of history. Why won't you recognise that for the time being power belongs to the West? It does, you know. Your efforts to put the clock back are just self-deception. Western ideas

are pouring into China at a rate which is beyond your power to stop. Don't try, or you will be overwhelmed. . . ."

"The Manchus once said that to us, Mr Willoughby, but where are they? We absorbed them so thoroughly that they can scarcely be found. Won't you understand in your turn that China is timeless? Everything has happened in China—everything except utter extinction. We Chinese are born and die in such countless millions that the impact of outside influences and people means no more to us than a flea means to a tiger. Bring an army here to kill fifty millions of us and you achieve nothing, because another fifty millions would take their places. Indeed, the loss of fifty millions would be a boon and a blessing to us, for we have not your sentimental attitude to life and death. If I live my normal span of life, I shall live to see Japan blunt her sword upon China, but she will achieve nothing. Mere brute force ceases to be a weapon against a feather bed. . . . I see disbelief in your eyes, Mr Willoughby. I am wasting my time. Soon—very soon, I shall be compelled to give you a lesson in humility. Your chauffeur, I see, has managed to give a fourth wheel to your chariot . . . see that no other small and inconsiderable object deters you from your high mission!"

Willoughby entered the car and drove off. Kung remained beside the kerb for a few moments in thought. Although neither knew it of the other, each had a high regard for the other's qualities, but the bar between East and West was raised between them.

Kung was a great rarity in China: a patriot. There were many purely regional patriots, men who thought in terms of city and province, but very few who thought in terms of all China. Because he was a patriot he resented bitterly the exploitation of China's disunity. Above all, he resented the privileged position of foreigners under extra-territorial law, under cloak of which an infinity of abuses had crept in. Shanghai itself was an affront to a Chinese patriot, peopled as it was by arrogant foreigners who snapped their fingers at Chinese law and custom. Since it was founded in the mid-nineteenth century, Shanghai had been little more than a funnel through which the wealth of China had been siphoned all over the

world. Wealthy men and huge corporations acquired vast fortunes which were spent elsewhere. China had not even the right to tax the profits which accrued from the bleeding of her people

To Kung, as he turned these thoughts over in his mind, only one certainty made life tolerable under foreign domination. the certainty that China would in the course of time engulf or sweep away these international transients who, by exploitation so ruthless that there was no parallel in the modern world, had brought China low. The ancient Flowery Kingdom had been assailed by many enemies in its long history, but it had vanquished them all because of the endless patience of its people and their selfless attitude to history Chinese patience did not merely extend for the span of a man's life; it was timeless, and continued, embracing generations unborn. Like the attrition of water, this vast fund of patience must prevail. Countless millions might die in order that it should prevail. Kung knew that he himself might be one unit in the holocaust, but the thought did not deter him. Self-respect—in which the attributes of a civilised person are summarised—demanded that he go on, whatever the cost. The line of least resistance would be to limit his activities to the degree which did not constitute a challenge to foreign authority, while still saving his own face and that of the Society But to do this would not satisfy the demands of self-respect. Much of the poverty of China had been created by foreign rapacity. Common justice demanded that this vast and wealthy foreign city contribute to the support of the homeless and destitute. More than this, Kung was determined that foreign authority itself should lose face, so that some of the smug arrogance be wiped off the faces of Europeans and Americans who bore themselves like the lords of creation.

Kung's reverie was rudely interrupted by the elbow of a ruddy-faced man with fair hair who, descending from a rickshaw, thrust past him and elbowed him into the gutter, grunting savagely as he passed: "Get to hell out of my way!"

"There was plenty of room for you," said Kung mildly. "Is it perhaps that your parents were so ill-born that they did not teach you manners?"

The reply to this was an open-handed slap across the face.

"That," said Kung in icy tones, "was the most foolish thing you ever did in your life."

The foreigner looked narrowly at Kung. Not liking what he read in the other's eyes, he turned hastily away and entered the Custom House Two young Chinese, who always followed Kung at a discreet distance, came forward at a run, prepared to do violence "Do not touch him," Kung told them, "but follow him, find out for me who he is, where he lives and works. Before I sleep to-night I want to know all there is to know about him, down to the last detail."

"It would be a pleasure," said one of the young men, "to kill him."

"To kill the man," said Kung softly, "would be to descend to his level. Violence is the last resort of the barbarian. Besides, to kill him would be to solve his problems for him . . . and I have no mind to do that."

Late that same evening, in the privacy of his own living quarters, Kung sucked down into his lungs deep breaths laden with the acrid fumes of opium smoke. At once, as though some magic hand had cut a knotted muscle, the tension eased. Ever since he had suffered the ignominy of a blow in public he had been taut with rage, scarcely able to think of anything but how to wipe out the affront. Beside him on the table lay a neatly-written report, covering two foolscap sheets. For several minutes Kung studied these intently, and when he had finished, touched a match to the corner of them, watching while they were reduced to ashes.

A staccato sigh escaped Kung's lips, which began to move in almost silent speech. "Because, noble ancestors, I do not wish to dishonour your name, and because with rage in my heart I do not trust myself for a little while, I will sleep on the matter. While I sleep, noble ancestors, take counsel together, so that when I awake refreshed I may seek your advice as to the manner in which justice may be done to this insolent barbarian."

* * * * *

A Chinese detective, who had been waiting patiently in an outer office, answered the summons and stood respectfully before Willoughby's desk.

" You have something to report ? " asked the latter.

" On The Bund this morning," began the detective, " a few moments after you had spoken to the respected Kung outside the Custom House, a strange thing occurred. A foreigner, a large man with a red face, in stepping from a rickshaw, knocked the respected Kung into the gutter. He protested, but the red-faced foreigner struck him in the face."

" What happened then ? "

" The respected Kung spoke to him in English, which I do not understand, and the man went into the Custom House. The respected Kung then spoke to two young Chinese, who followed the red-faced foreigner for the rest of the morning, making inquiries as they went. I followed them, thinking you would want a report. . ."

" You did well," said Willoughby. " The matter will be entered in the book against your name. And the man ? The foreigner ? Who is he ? "

For reply the detective put a slip of paper on the desk, saluted and left the office.

Not for the first time in his police career, Willoughby found himself at a cross-roads. One way, plainly marked, lay duty, the other, less plainly marked, lay personal inclination. He looked with a gesture of distaste at the slip of paper which lay before him, on which was written the name of a fellow-countryman, John Blackross, a man whom he knew well and cordially disliked. The story he had heard from the Chinese detective accorded well with all he knew and suspected of John Blackross.

There were so many alternatives before Willoughby. He might ring up Kung and advise him to swear out a complaint against the man who had assaulted him but there were objections to this. Kung would be reluctant to have the news of this humiliation become the subject of gossip. He might equally well telephone Blackross and warn him that he had made a very dangerous enemy. As Willoughby contemplated this course, he shrank from it. Blackross had surely forfeited the right to such consideration. He did not believe that Kung would use violence in order to level the score, for violence was foreign to Kung's nature as Willoughby knew it. Equally

he was quite sure that in one way or another, by legal means or illegal, John Blackross would regret what he had done.

It was some minutes before Willoughby decided to follow the signpost which pointed the way towards duty. With great reluctance he told the telephone operator to get John Blackross on the line.

"Why does the great detective wish to speak to me?" asked a sarcastic voice a few moments later.

"I thought it my duty to warn you that you did a very foolish thing to-day," said Willoughby in cold tones "You hit a perfectly inoffensive Chinese gentleman on The Bund. . . ."

"Since when are Chinese gentlemen?"

"Since about four thousand years," replied Willoughby, "Perhaps a bit more, some of them. But you wouldn't know about that."

"So I hit a chink. What of it? He was in my way and gave me a lot of lip . . ."

"You picked a very bad one to hit, Blackross. I wouldn't be surprised if you regret it one of these days. However, that's your affair. I rang you merely to warn you that the man you chose to hit this time is the kind of man who knows how to hit back. That's all."

"Am I supposed to be scared? Is that it? You've been reading too many Chinese mystery stories, Willoughby. Your trouble is . . ."

The rest of John Blackross's remarks were addressed to a dead telephone line.

Against his first judgment, Willoughby telephoned Kung.

"To what do I owe this pleasure?" asked the latter when he came to the telephone.

"I was very sorry to learn, Mr Kung, that you were the victim of an assault on The Bund this morning shortly after we met. I merely rang you to say that one of my men happened to witness the entire incident. If you should feel you want to swear out a complaint, I thought you ought to know that you have a perfectly clear case and that I would give you all possible assistance. I don't feel, however, that without complaint from you anything can be done. His name is . . ."

"Thank you, Mr Willoughby, you are more than kind.

I think I would prefer not to be told the man's name. I thank you also for your offer, but I shall not trouble to avail myself of it. The man is beneath contempt. To revive the matter would be to renew the unpleasantness and I, Mr Willoughby, am enough of a philosopher to believe that, shall we call it Providence, will contrive to repay him in kind. I appreciate your courtesy—more than I can say."

"Well, don't, I beg you, Mr Kung," said the detective with some warmth in his voice, "feel impelled to aid—Providence. I think I would feel as you do about the matter."

"Do not worry, Mr Willoughby. I am too humble a person to presume to aid Providence. Good-bye."

CHAPTER IX

THE low mist which lay over the Whangpoo and most of Shanghai itself carried the tacit promise that when the sun rose a little higher there would be another golden autumn day. Hard by the Garden Bridge, which crosses the Soochow Creek at the point where this waterway—surely one of the world's busiest—empties into the Whangpoo, a houseboat with singularly graceful lines lay moored, the appearance of grace heightened by the soft vignette of mist.

As Kung alighted from his carriage a few yards from the gates of the British Consulate-General, his eyes grew bright with pleasure at the familiar scene before him. Although in the heart of the International Settlement, this was of the very essence of China itself. From the water, beautifully distorted in the murk, came the deep grunts of men straining at oars, the creak of cordage and the mock angry cries of watermen as they picked a way through the dense traffic. Disreputable *sampans*, unspeakable barges and absurdly laden cargo lighters, most of them in the last stages of dilapidation, seen thus in soft focus, acquired an unearthly beauty.

"Surely," said the young man who was Kung's nephew, "since time is so valuable and there are many pressing affairs which require your attention, it would be better to take the train. It is a comfortable journey of less than two hours. . . ."

"I always feared," said Kung in English, "that the years you spent at the American University would infect you with an obsession for speed. While you were there did you by chance read anything of Robert Louis Stevenson?"

"I do not remember it," said the nephew wonderingly.

"It is a pity," said Kung, "for while I doubt whether he will take his place among the immortals, he understood something of the inwardness of travel. He said: *It is better to travel*

hopefully than to arrive. Does it not occur to you that the journey itself can be as important as the destination? In effect I shall not travel. The houseboat is for the next two days my home. I am like a snail, who takes his house with him. I have my books, a few simple ornaments which I love. My cook will prepare for me the meals which I like, so I shall be living in a beloved home. When this home arrives at the confluence with the Grand Canal, I shall so arrange matters that we arrive at the end of my garden at the hour of dawn. Thus it will not be a journey, but rather the coming together of two beloved homes I am left two joyful days to savour the moment in anticipation. On the way there will be brief meetings with old friends, familar craft and well-loved scenes. The peasants will be threshing their rice . . . and you, you would have me roar through the countryside choked with coal dust."

"Nevertheless, my respected uncle," said the young man, relapsing into his native tongue, "you have impressed upon me the urgency of many affairs and the pressure upon your time. I do not understand . . ."

"It seems," said Kung with an affectionate smile, "that I am doomed to be misunderstood. Try to understand something. To every living creature is given an amount of life which the Western mathematician would call x. The tortoise, which is a slow-moving creature, frequently lost in contemplation, uses up x very slowly, taking as much sometimes as several centuries to do so The mosquito, on the other hand, because its nature is different, uses up x very quickly. Because of its abominable habit of persistent and mostly futile movement and the incessant noise it makes, it lives for only a few hours. In each case x is identical. There are, if my meaning is not already clear to you, two methods of burning a measure of oil. One method is to burn it economically in a lamp with a small wick: the other method is to toss the entire measure on to a bonfire. The quantity of oil remains the same, whatever the method. Think of me, if you will, as a tortoise, or, if you prefer it, a very small and economical lamp . . . and now I will be on my way."

"If anything urgent requires your attention," said the

nephew, who seemed far from happy, "or if there is important news, you will permit me to communicate with you by the telegraph?"

"If there is good news," said Kung, stepping lightly aboard the houseboat, "send it to me by the telegraph if you wish. If there is bad news, send it to me by water, entrusted to the *laodah* of the slowest craft you can find. Have I not already told you that the deep red rose sent to me from England is in bud? I do not want its sweetness embittered."

"I find it strange, respected uncle, that you sent to England for roses. . . ."

"I sent to England for roses for the only possible reason: that certain roses have reached the highest perfection there. Do not allow prejudice, or pride of race, to blind you to beauty, wherever created."

Kung's nephew stood on the bank of the Soochow Creek until the houseboat was lost in the mist. Alone with great responsibilities, he had already begun to feel somewhat small and humble

Long before noon the day had fulfilled its golden promise. With two great oars plied lustily, three men to an oar, the houseboat had been propelled beyond the limits of the International Settlement and into China proper. The Soochow Creek cut across flat but beautiful country, rich with the black silt which had been brought down in some bygone age from the immense valley of the Yangtsze River. Here were fine rice-land, vegetable gardens where grew giant cauliflowers so large that a man's arms could hardly span them, Savoy cabbages firm as rocks, and every kind of green food possible, in quantities sufficient to satisfy Shanghai's insatiable appetite. From the city came an endless line of horrid barges, laden with sewage, the city's own contribution to the fertility of a land already fertile beyond the wildest imaginings of most people.

Here, all around him, Kung, lolling on the after-deck of the houseboat, watched the age-old struggle to maintain the fertility of the land at a scale commensurate with the fecundity of those who depended upon it. These were the realities of life and although at times disgusted by the nauseous stenches, he thrilled as he felt himself once more away from crowded build-

ings and paved streets, borne gently upon the pulsating bosom of a waterway which was in fact a vital artery—one of thousands —through which the lifeblood of China was pumped.

The prissy manners and affectations of the city were far behind. Here men and women were down to earth. The rotation of crops was so swift that it was always harvest-time, always seed-time. Even when the bitter winds swept down from Siberia and Mongolia, the struggle to feed the teeming millions of the city continued. There was scarcely any pasture, for the land was too precious. Wherever weeds and grass made their appearance, either they went to feed the patient water buffaloes, or were stacked carefully to complete the cycle of corruption and return to the soil. Amid infinite pains and industry there was no waste. Except for an occasional shade tree, owned pridefully in common by the villagers, there were no trees on this flat land. There had been trees once, but they had all gone centuries previously to feed the stoves which cooked the rice. Now for fuel there was only charcoal, which came hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles from the sparsely-populated parts of this great land, where trees had been permitted to survive.

That small part of Kung which had been touched by the ideas of the West winced when he gazed across the flat landscape to see countless thousands of grave mounds, each occupying valuable space which ought to be devoted to growing food for the living. No man in all China had greater reverence for his ancestors, but Kung knew with a great certainty that this encroachment by the dead on the rights of the living was become a major problem. Yet, even as he disapproved, he warmed to the reverence of these poor people, many of whom endured great hardship as, with every generation, the land given over to the dead made life more difficult for the living. To sweep all this away suddenly would, he knew, strike at the very roots of Chinese civilisation, while to delay reform too long could also be fatal. Without the simple faith which caused all classes of Chinese to offer reverence to their ancestors, the land would be swept by a tidal wave of impiety. While he applauded that reverence, all that was practical in Kung told him that it must take another form. But what form? How to kick away one

prop upon which a civilisation rested without endangering the whole?

Kung's soliloquy was brought to an end when the *laodah*, acting upon orders, brought the houseboat in to the bank of the waterway, putting away the long oars. At the spot chosen, a narrow towpath, as smooth and clearly defined as a paved way, ran along either bank From here onwards for the greater part of the journey, two men at a time, in two-hour shifts, would pull the houseboat from the bank. If a headwind should arise, their number would have to be doubled. If a following wind came to the rescue, the men at the tow-line would jump eagerly aboard to haul up the huge lateen sail which lay furled on the top deck

There was a small house on the bank of the waterway some eighty yards distant from the houseboat. The door opened and two men emerged carrying a long bundle wound round with sacking. In a few moments the bundle rolled down from the bank, falling with a thud on to the deck at Kung's feet. Then, the tow-mast erected, the crew of the houseboat gambled to decide which of them should take the first shift on the tow-line.

In a few moments the only sounds to be heard were the rhythmic grunts of the men towing and the faint hiss at the cut-water as the houseboat went smoothly on its way. There was soon a third sound as the bundle stirred and groaned.

It had seemed wiser to Kung to take on this bundle when beyond the jurisdiction of the Shanghai police, who, under Willoughby's orders, might have seen fit to search the houseboat. The bundle contained a very unhappy man, none other than the brother of Pearl, whose plan had gone so woefully astray. For this wretched man the last ten days had been a nightmare. In Hongkong, where he had believed himself safe, four men had invaded his lodgings in the middle of the night, gagging him with a filthy handful of cotton waste. A hot cigarette applied to the sole of his foot had refreshed his memory as to the hiding-place of the jewels, of which he had not yet dared to dispose. There had followed some six days aboard a ship, but which ship and whither bound he did not know, for he had lain in his own filth, securely bound, in the tunnel which

housed the propellor shaft. Then, like some bale of merchandise, he had been loaded into a wheelbarrow several times, between agonising intervals of uncertainty, to arrive with the final thump on to the deck of Kung's houseboat.

Kung, in whose satchel now reposed the missing jewellery, that which had been left in his charge by Lok-wen, together with Pearl's own jewels, contemplated the bundle with distaste, turning over in his mind as he did so the problem of how to deal justly with the matter. Kung was still angry, for the incident of the robbery had involved him in some humiliation and a vast amount of trouble and annoyance. He was now in the position of judge as well as prosecutor, and a good judge must, if he is to serve the ends of justice, deal without heat or rancour. So, for a little while longer, until Kung should have arrived at a dispassionate attitude of mind, Pearl's perfidious brother must remain in suspense.

Now that he was on the way to Soochow, to the peace and beauty of his garden by the Grand Canal, Kung addressed his mind to the problem of Pearl also. The more he thought about the matter, the more convinced he became that Pearl and her brother were one problem rather than two.

When night fell Shanghai lay some twenty miles astern. Kung, who was in no great hurry and did not care to work his men like beasts of burden, ordered a halt for the night at a point where the waterway widened and where, therefore, there would be no obstruction of traffic. The two men who had put aboard the bundle containing Pearl's brother had also brought a little opium. When he had smoked a few pipes in the peace of the evening calm, he knew that clarity of thought would come to him.

"Ease his bonds a little," said Kung, nodding towards the bundle. "Give him some food and drink. When I call, bring him to me."

Entering the saloon of the houseboat, a chaste apartment done entirely in cream-coloured lacquer, with a carpet and curtains of squashed-strawberry pink and a shelf on which reposed two pale jade lions, Kung sat down to a simple evening meal. He ate sparingly of a little boiled rice and a dish of chicken livers cooked in a thick sauce, heavily flavoured with

garlic and green peppers. For the rest he toyed with a dish of Canton ginger in a heavy syrup, followed by several cups of fragrant tea. An hour later, refreshed by four pipes of opium, Kung went out on to the after-deck where Pearl's brother lay in a heap with his head free of the sacking.

"I am come," he said to the wretched youth, "to ask you a few questions. To these questions I require the truth in reply. Let me warn you now that if you lie, sooner or later I shall detect your lies. If you tell me the truth, omitting nothing and adding nothing, I shall be inclined to be merciful. Otherwise, mark you, I shall be inclined towards justice rather than mercy. Guard your tongue well."

"I will confess everything," said the young man, who had recognised Kung immediately and was in a frenzy of terror. "I will not lie."

"When you conspired with your sister to rob me, was the plan wholly yours, wholly hers, or a joint plan?" asked Kung mildly.

"It was wholly my sister's plan," came the trembling reply.

"Then what was arranged between you as to the disposal of the jewels?"

The youth hesitated before replying. "My sister was to meet me in Hongkong, where we would divide everything."

"Was it your sister's plan or yours that her jewels should be stolen as well as those entrusted to me by the jeweller? Think well before you reply."

"It was my sister's plan. It would have been strange for robbers to overlook her jewels. Also, it was planned to collect the money from the insurance company."

"I give you a last chance, wretched youth," said Kung. "If you have lied to me in any particular, tell me now and correct that lie. If you have spoken the truth—and I do not believe this—I shall be very merciful. But if it should transpire that you have lied, there will be no mercy. To have conspired to rob me was one crime. To endeavour falsely to place the entire blame upon your sister is an infinitely greater crime, for she is of your blood and you owe her loyalty. Do you wish to change any single reply you have given me?"

The young man shook his head.

" In a few moments," Kung continued, " the moon will have risen above the crosstree on yonder mast. It will then be too late to change your mind."

The young man summoned from somewhere the remnants of his courage. He was not very shrewd, but he sensed that the elder man shrank spiritually from the incident of the robbery and the concomitant circumstances. " Unless you kill me—and I do not think you will do that—you cannot seal my mouth," he said, greatly daring. " My sister, too, is not without friends in high places."

" Young man," said Kung severely, " you demonstrated that you were a fool when you robbed me. Do not add to your folly by making idle threats. You lie at the feet of a much-threatened man . . . and the moon has risen above the crosstree. Take him out of my sight," he added, calling to two members of the crew.

In the morning was a fine breeze. At dawn the lateen sail was hoisted, so that the houseboat was able to maintain a speed more than twice that when towed. At noon the *laodah* came aft to discuss matters with Kung. " If the breeze holds," he said, " we can make Soochow two full hours before sundown, and the master can sleep in his own home to-night, unless he prefers to arrive with the dawn as planned."

" Perhaps the setting of the sun is a better hour for a home-coming than the dawn," said Kung after a little thought. " See to it that when I arrive there is enough light for me to see my roses."

A full hour before sunset, with the houseboat slapping at the waters of the Grand Canal as a cool, breeze drove her onwards, Kung stood in the bows straining his eyes to catch a first glimpse of his rose garden.

" An extra week's pay for every member of the crew," he said with a smile as he stepped lightly ashore.

So absorbed was Kung in his roses that darkness had fallen before he realised it. The house servants, knowing his love of flowers, kept themselves in the background until he should be ready to receive them.

There was one rose in the garden which meant more to Kung than all the others, a rambler which had completely covered a

small summer-house. As roses go, it was nothing remarkable, but it had been planted by the hand of his beloved wife, who had brought a cutting from her father's garden beside the lake at Hangchow.

Kung, reclining within the shadow of the summer-house, relived the hour of its planting. It had been just such another golden autumn day as this, nearly a year after their marriage. He had come upon her in the act of unwrapping the cutting from its covering of wet moss.

There had been no room in his life then, Kung reflected, for abstract dreams of reforming the whole world. His world had been the little circle in which his girl wife knelt to plant the cutting in the rich soil, and how that little world had been swept away. Only the rambler rose, its main stem now almost as thick as a man's arm, was a reminder of happier days.

Controlling the emotion which tore him asunder, for it was unthinkable that he should reveal his tenderness to the servants, Kung walked across the garden and into the lighted interior of his own house. He did not even remember—still less see—the slender figure of another girl crouched beside the door, her eyes blazing with resentment at being thus ignored.

* * * * *

At two o'clock on a fine afternoon, while some fifty odd miles away Kung was sunning himself in his garden beside the Grand Canal, a less peaceful scene was enacted in Shanghai. The occasion was a Board Meeting in the sombrely magnificent offices of the Shanghai General Insurance Company, Ltd. There was a full attendance of directors, for the matters under discussion were of great importance. The secretary of the company, a taciturn Scot, read the minutes of the last meeting, and, after these had been hastily adopted, gave place to Mr Gordon Burnside, who occupied the joint position of chairman and general manager.

From notes in front of him Burnside recited to his horrified colleagues some disturbing figures. Although the overall picture showed that such crimes as burglary, theft, pilferage and the like were lower in Shanghai than ever before recorded, the company had borne the highest total of claims of this nature

during the preceding twelve months as compared with any similar period in its history. "But this is not all," continued Burnside. "An abnormally high proportion of policies falling due for renewal are not being renewed. Furthermore, after private consultation with our principal competitors in this class of insurance, I may tell you that their experience during the last year is roughly the same as our own. The position has shown a marked deterioration during the last three months."

"Then," said a complacent voice, "we shall have to raise our rates to meet conditions. . . ."

"If policy-holders are reluctant to renew at the present rates," observed Burnside caustically, "I cannot see why they should show enthusiasm to renew at higher rates. Besides, there isn't any justification for higher rates—on the facts. There is considerably less crime of this nature, taking Shanghai as a whole."

"Then if there is less crime against property," said another voice, "I fail to see why claims against the company are higher. It's illogical."

"It *is* illogical, but, unhappily, it is true. In readiness for this meeting I have had an analysis prepared, an analysis which, I fear, makes the position abundantly clear. Out of 2,842 policies which have fallen due for renewal and have not been renewed during the period under review, I find on investigation that 2,711 of the policy-holders are subscribers to the funds of the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society. That is not all. Out of $8,375,622 claims paid by the company during the same period, some 98 per cent were paid to policy-holders who were *not* subscribers to the funds of the Society. In brief, therefore, this means that property-owners generally are coming rapidly to the conclusion that to submit to the extortions of this infamous Society is not only cheaper, but *more effective*—and justice compels me to admit that at first blush this is so—than the protection of property by insurance. To raise our rates is out of the question, for it would only aggravate a situation which is already near the danger line. To lower the rates would, I fear"—Burnside paused for effect—"involve the purchase of considerable quantities of red ink."

"Then," said a voice which was no longer complacent,

"what is to happen? What is the remedy? My shares, I know, are worth a hundred thousand dollars less than they were a year ago, and I for one don't like it."

"We are met to discuss remedies," said Burnside coldly. "Has anyone any observations to make?"

"Let's not beat about the bush any longer," said another director. "The issue is a perfectly simple and straightforward one. We have either got to fight Kung and his precious Society, or come to terms with him. Which is it to be?" The speaker looked around him for support.

"Big as we are," Burnside reminded the Board, "we cannot fight alone. But we can take the lead, whichever course we decide to adopt. My personal inclination is to fight, but I warn you, gentlemen, that it will be a hard fight. Furthermore, I do not believe there is one company in Shanghai which, standing alone, could fight Kung—and survive."

After some minutes it became apparent that there was no unanimity of thought at the table. One faction wanted to fight. Another wanted to compromise, and this latter was the larger. Two directors declared themselves in favour of coming to terms. "We're in the insurance business to make money," observed one of them. "Unless we come to terms with this fellow Kung, it seems, we're not going to make any."

"I do not wish to convey the impression," said Burnside dryly, "that I am above sordid considerations of money-making, for I am not. I believe, however, that the mere making of money does not justify departure from principle. As I understand matters, insurance is a stabilising force in business. Its continuance hinges upon utter rectitude of operation. If it should transpire that the sense of this meeting is in favour of surrendering our principles and entering into an alliance—which is what it amounts to—with a quasi-criminal organisation, I shall have to ask you to accept my resignation. That's flat!"

Quong, who had hitherto remained silent, caught the chairman's eye.

"As the only Chinese member of the Board," said Quong softly, "and perhaps the only member who understands the methods of the Society of which we are speaking, I would like to make a few observations. It grieves me to have to disagree

with one with whom I have enjoyed many years of loyal service, but I feel that the time has come to speak. Because of Kung and his Society there is *less* crime in Shanghai, not more. Kung extends the protection of the Society to those who contribute to its funds. It is scarcely reasonable to expect that he should protect those who do not contribute. This honourable company does not pay to persons other than policy-holders the losses incurred by theft. . . ."

"Obviously not!" snapped Burnside. "There is no comparison between insurance and—thinly-veiled blackmail."

"You are viewing the matter through wholly Western eyes, Mr Burnside," continued Quong with a suavity which did not mask his determination. "The Western attitude towards crimes against property is to assume that they are unavoidable. Hence the prosperity of this honourable company, which lives by compensating its policy-holders against losses and, by quoting a rate somewhat higher than the actual risk warrants, makes a profit. Do not misunderstand me. This honourable company's method's are above reproach. Let us speak rather of the respected Kung and the Society which he controls. His methods, believe me, are no less honourable. In China, gentlemen, we have proved—over several thousand years—that crime springs from want, from poverty. In China there is no *criminal class*. When floods, or other causes, create famine and want, there is always a wave of crime, which follows as surely as the night follows the day. Some hungry men, with what you call oriental fatalism, are content to sit down and die. Others are too timid to become thieves, while a third class, if its necessities are not relieved by charitable persons, turns to crime.

"We have always recognised these things as truths so obvious as to be beyond argument. We have always recognised also that the care of the needy is the duty of more prosperous persons. The Thieves' Guild, therefore, as it is known in your language, has had recognition as an honourable undertaking conducted by honourable men. How otherwise can you explain the peaceful life of a people of some 450 millions, and their freedom from crime, when there has never been an organised police force such as you of the West maintain to keep order?"

Quong's sincerity and the intensity of his feeling communicated itself to these shrewd, hard-boiled men of affairs gathered round the board-room table. They kept silence, hanging on his every word.

"Our Chinese system," continued Quong, "was created for small villages and towns. In these it has always been successful. In my native village, which I have known for more than sixty years, I have only known of one case of theft, and that was the work of a stranger. The Thieves' Guild, as you call it, was never quite so successful in great cities, where problems multiply themselves. The respected Kung, therefore, has tried to adapt the Thieves' Guild to the needs of this great city of Shanghai. Gentlemen, I beg you to believe that he is not your enemy. He is, rather, your natural ally. . . ."

"If you are right, Quong," said Burnside coldly, "neither insurance companies nor police are necessary in a community where Kung controls the thieves. In other words, we are asked to surrender the government of Shanghai to him. . . ."

"In a civilised community, Mr Burnside," said Quong, "neither police nor insurance should be necessary. That they are necessary is surely proof that society is badly organised? The respected Kung, by expending the contributions of benevolent persons on the care of the homeless and hungry—some of whom, if neglected, are certain to become criminals—strikes at the root of the problem." Quong paused before continuing. "It is this honourable company and others established in Shanghai which profit by the existence of crime. We at this table, because of this, are far more the accomplices of criminals than is the respected Kung. . . ."

"Gentlemen," said Burnside impatiently, "will those who are in favour of surrendering the entire authority of the International Settlement to an organisation of thieves kindly indicate the same in the usual manner."

He looked round the table for raised hands and, seeing none, continued: "It seems, Quong, that you are in a minority of one. It seems also that since you are so out of sympathy with the aims of this company, your presence here is hardly necessary. Your co-directors will, I know, be reluctant to accept your resignation from the Board, but in all the circumstances . . ."

"I brought my resignation with me, Mr Burnside," said Quong with dignity, passing an envelope to the head of the table. "I did not hope to convince these gentlemen and yourself of the truth. I have been and I still am a loyal servant of this honourable company. As such, therefore, permit me to say one final word. To-morrow, next month, next year, or in five years, you will remember what I say, for either you will compromise with the respected Kung, or you will be swept away. It is not only the Chinese who are his supporters. More than half the foreigners in Shanghai support him. I beg you to reflect before it is—too late."

With a courteous bow towards the Chair, Quong left the board-room for the last time. There were tears in his eyes when he reached the solitude of the corridor outside, for he had just torn out of himself the greater part of his life. The void hurt him.

There was a long silence after Quong left the room, for he enjoyed the personal esteem of almost every man present. Not one of them had any illusions as to the part the Chinese compradore had played in building the company to its present eminence; not one entertained the least doubt as to his integrity, or his far-seeing wisdom. Time and again situations had arisen when only Quong's grave voice had saved them from serious mistakes and errors of judgment. Now Quong was gone, a hurt and disillusioned man. The men at the board-room table knew a sense of guilt, but not one of them was able to forget pride of race for a moment, follow Quong and urge him to return. The disagreement had been too vital, for it was a disagreement founded solely on racial conceptions. Quong's attitude had been Oriental. Theirs had been Occidental. The thrusting, pushful West was not so sure of itself that it could afford to be generous and admit the possibility that here was a case where Western standards did not make sense. More than this, for in taking up their stand Quong's co-directors sincerely believed that they had moral right on their side. If that were so, then it followed that Quong must be wrong.

The one way of thinking was pure, dazzling white: the other was as black as night itself.

There was once in China a great argument among mathematicians, astronomers and other wise men. Some clung to

the ancient view that the world was flat. Others held that it was spherical and proceeded to prove their contention. "All our calculations are upon the assumption that the earth is round," they said. "If our predictions as to the movements of certain heavenly bodies prove correct, it follows that our assumption is correct also."

But there were men among them wiser than mere mathematicians, who are seldom wise because of their habit of precision, which they apply to precise as well as imprecise things. These wiser men, therefore, agreed that a formula be devised to satisfy both parties to the dispute, so that neither should lose face, and lest the dispute became too heated, which would ill become wise men. At length it was agreed among them that while the earth had a certain roundness, it was also somewhat flat in parts.

The directors of the Shanghai General Insurance Company lacked this forbearance, in which they showed themselves somewhat less than wise.

"Now," said Gordon Burnside with a deep sigh, "it remains to be decided what we are going to do about it. Don't let's fool ourselves, for we have a fight on our hands. Has anyone any suggestions?"

There was an awkward silence. The verb "to fight" conjures up in the Anglo-Saxon mind, which is still sufficiently near to its origins to pin faith in violence, a picture of a physical struggle. It still suggests the battle-axe and the mailed fist, neither of which is very effective against an intangible and elusive enemy, and altogether useless against a different conception of what is right and wrong. The men who crucified the Christ defeated their own purpose, for without the Crucifixion there could have been no legend of the Resurrection to sustain men's hearts down through the ages. Only one way of defeating an idea has ever been found: to produce a better idea. Nobody at this table had a better idea. More calamitous still: even those who had lingering doubts did not care to express them, for to do so seemed at that moment like a renunciation of race, a betrayal of Caucasian forthrightness to Mongol casuistry. It was not enough for them that they had brought to the East the best that the West had been able to

devise to combat thieves. It did not occur to them that this, although the setting was Eastern, might yet be able to work in harmony with the best of the East's devising. To have yielded as much would have been to these men—all good men of business according to their lights—a surrender to Eastern decadence. At all costs, the legend of Caucasian supremacy must be maintained.

"Then," said Burnside at length, breaking a tense silence, "I ask you to empower me to negotiate and come to an agreement with the other companies for concerted action. I shall require authority for the expenditure of a large sum—if necessary."

"How large?"

"Call it a million dollars—to start with."

"Are you going to buy this fellow Kung?"

"No," replied Burnside, flashing an angry glance at his questioner, "I'm going to break him."

There came down the river valley the roll of thunder. Was it, more than one man asked himself, a reply to a challenge?

CHAPTER X

PEARL OF THE MORNING was not happy. For the first time in her short life she found herself in a setting where tantrums availed her nothing. "Why," she demanded tearfully of a servant, two days after Kung's return home, "has he not come to see me?"

"It could be," replied the man in courteous tones, but pointedly, "that he has other matters to occupy his mind."

"Does he know that I am in the house?" she asked, shrill with rising indignation.

"That I do not know. In this house it is the master who gives orders and asks questions. . . ."

"Then you have not even told him that I am here?"

"You came here by the master's orders," said the servant impassively. "He has not countermanded those orders. It is to be assumed, therefore, that he knows of your presence."

"I demand that you tell him," said Pearl haughtily.

"Only the master demands here. Others await his pleasure."

Pearl felt somewhat better when she had torn a lovely embroidered cushion cover to shreds. Its soft colouring and good taste had always offended her. With the point of a pair of manicure scissors she ripped open the cushion itself, scattering clouds of feathers all over the room. The cushion cover had been a beautiful thing, depicting a fisherman casting a net into a lake from a small *sampan*. There were high mountains in the background, tree-clad, misty and elusive. Some long-dead artist had imbued the scene with great peace. Five minutes of vandalism had wrought more damage than four generations of loving use.

Shortly after the work of destruction was done a servant came to the door. "The master will receive you in fifteen minutes," he announced.

" If he wants to see me, let him come here ! " stormed Pearl.

" You wish me to deliver that message ? "

With unprintable epithets ringing in his ears, the man left the room. What was the use, Pearl asked herself, of wreaking such fearful havoc, if the object of her wrath could not see it ? In imagination she enacted the stormy scene which must follow when Kung saw what she had done. The prospect frightened her, but at the same time she savoured it with pleasurable anticipation.

When fifteen minutes had passed, Pearl became impatient. Having keyed herself up to face an embattled scene, she was in a fever to be done with it, come what may. When an hour had passed, hot rage became sullen anger. Savoury scents rose from the kitchen quarters, accompanied by the clatter of dishes as a meal was served. Pearl, who had a healthy appetite, knew that she was very hungry. The knowledge served to rekindle her rage, for pride would now prevent her from asking for food.

The evening was well advanced before a servant arrived in the room and, without uttering a word, began to remove from it all the ornaments. In a few moments he was joined by another man, who helped him to remove the bed and then the fine Peking carpet. A dressing-table with mirror and then the stool followed quickly. When they were done nothing was left except the feathers which had been scattered from the cushion.

Pearl then watched in dumb silence while a pallet bed, such as used by humble coolies, was thrown into the room, followed by a coarse blanket. A tin pannikin of water was put inside the door, while the men prepared to withdraw. " The master," said the elder of the two with perfect courtesy, " will receive you to-morrow at noon."

" Am I to be starved ? " asked Pearl tearfully.

" The master has not discussed with me his intentions."

The door closed quietly. The key turned in the lock and Pearl was alone with her thoughts. Nothing where Kung was concerned ever seemed to turn out according to expectations. She was fully prepared to be raped, to be beaten, or to be subjected to the lash of Kung's artistic tongue. Any or all of

these she could have borne with equanimity, but to be ignored was the crowning indignity. The pallet bed also was hard and not very clean, and it would be many hours before the dawn.

At noon, after an almost sleepless night, Pearl followed a servant to where Kung sat sunning himself on the bank of the Grand Canal. Kung remained silent until the servant had withdrawn. "I regret deeply," he said at length, "that the poor hospitality of my humble house does not please you. I hope that the new arrangement of your quarters, more in keeping with your station in life, are to your liking."

Pearl hung her head in shamed silence For once she could find nothing to say.

"I have sent for you," Kung continued, "because I wish to ask you certain questions. It will be better for—both of us if your answers are truthful."

"What do you want to know?" Pearl said sullenly.

"Cast your mind back to the night when certain ill-intentioned persons broke into your house and stole certain jewels belonging to yourself and the respected Lok-wen. Were the faces of either of the robbers familiar to you?"

"No." The answer came defiantly, but there was the ring of fear in it.

"Then you will agree that the person who told me that one of the robbers was your own blood brother was an abominable liar?"

Pearl agreed softly, her head still hung in shame.

"But supposing that this person did not lie and that in the great excitement of the moment you failed to recognise your brother, do you agree that he should be punished?"

"He should be boiled in oil!" said Pearl savagely, for she was thinking of her own jewels.

"That, I feel, is a somewhat excessive punishment. Can you not think of a lesser punishment, one more in accordance with the crime? Your great indignation does you credit, but we must always remember to be merciful. Help me by thinking of a suitable punishment—that is, if the person who told me this shameful thing spoke the truth. A brother who would rob his own sister—such a man merits punishment."

"I would like to see him flogged until the blood ran from him in rivers," was the vicious reply. "I would stand by to watch and laugh while it was done."

"Thank you. I will bear in mind what you say," said Kung with the air of dismissal.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Pearl fearfully.

"I do not know," replied Kung. "You chatter too much, or I would be inclined to send you back to Shanghai. It was agreed between us that there was no robbery. You broke the agreement by claiming against the insurance company, causing me certain embarrassment. You will, therefore, remain here until it is convenient that you return to Shanghai. It is the price of breaking your given word. It will now be many weeks before you return, I fear, for there is work to be done."

"Work? What work?"

"Needles and silk thread will be provided for you at once so that you may set to work to repair the damage you did to a certain piece of embroidery last night. Until that is repaired you must certainly stay here. To destroy ancient things of beauty is to descend to the level of the animals."

"Your servants say," said Pearl, her courage rising to Kung's apparently mild manner, "that for the future I am to eat with them in the kitchen quarters. Is that true?"

"It is hard on them, but I fear that it is true. Association with them will, if you study them closely, teach you better manners. You were given the best that my poor home affords, as an honoured guest. You forgot that it is not only the host who has duties."

"You do not love me any more," said Pearl shrilly. "This is your way of getting rid of me—cheaply. Let me tell you that I am not without friends—influential friends. I will . . ."

"I do not love you. I never did love you. Nor have I ever used the word love to you. I wanted your body—briefly. That is all. It is a beautiful body, so beautiful indeed that it hides the ugliness of an empty mind. Your beauty is all you have, I fear. It resembles a fine lacquer wasted upon unworthy wood. I am greatly ashamed of my infatuation with your body, but I beg you do not dignify this base passion with the name of love. Spare me that final humiliation."

A beating would have been sheer pleasure beside this.

"My body is yours—for nothing," said Pearl in desperation, "if you will allow me to return to Shanghai."

"If I accept the offer, it will not be as part of a bargain. It will be because you want to give me your body—without conditions. In the meanwhile, there will be time to think of many things. Turn your mind to the beauties of nature and the beauty of things made by hands. Think less of your own beauty. If you can do this, a time will come when you will thank me. Your beauty will fade, as a rose fades. It will not, as the rose, throw forth fresh beauties with every year. Yours will only fade once, and then, Pearl of the Morning, if you do not cultivate your mind, there will be nothing—nothing except memories which will be very bitter."

Kung watched the retreating girl's back sadly. Although it was too much to hope, he had hoped that she would make a clean breast of the affair. This was one of the frequent occasions when Kung despaired of humanity. Human stupidity passed all belief. He wondered whether, as these thoughts crossed his mind, he was not being too severe with this empty-headed girl, whose humble origins had given her little chance. He wondered, too, whether his own lifetime spent among the dizzy peaks of scholarly abstractions had not made him impatient with lesser minds. Deep in thought, he turned towards the farthest corner of his garden where, several years previously, his delicate hands had rescued from reversion to its primitive type a bush rose which through neglect had become a climber, its blooms deteriorating with every year that passed. One day the fancy had seized him to graft upon the almost wild stem a superb dark red rose which, with others, had been sent to him by a former French Minister to the Court of Peking, from his own rose garden among the rolling hills of Burgundy. Under the pressure of other and less pleasant affairs the graft had been forgotten. Now, and to his infinite joy, Kung found that it had succeeded. He cut one of the deep red blooms, held it to his nose and allowed its fragrance to conjure back pleasant memories.

To Kung his garden was a true garden of remembrance, for roses had been the link between him and a host of friends who

shared his passion. Most were in China, several in England and France, in America and even Japan. A gross-living Japanese industrial baron had once come to this garden and, under the influence of its beauty, had wept copiously, offering to buy it for a fantastic sum. Kung had rebuffed him none too gently, but even with this barrier between them they had become friends, their common passion proving stronger than instinctive misunderstanding on all other questions. Gently carrying the deep red rose he had cut from what had once been a common, degenerate rambler, Kung's mind, wandering fancy free, returned to Pearl, seeing an analogy between the two. Would it be possible, he wondered, to implant culture and a love of beauty and grace in the barren soil of this girl's mind? Why not? There was no essential difference between a rose and any other living thing in the scheme of creation. The differences were of degree only. A rose had thorns for the same reasons that a cat had claws and some old women viperish tongues.

Then, as suddenly as the lifting of a cloud, Kung knew that he was no longer the slave of Pearl's lovely body. For the first time he was able to regard it and her with utter detachment. No longer would his judgment be warped, nor his sleep disturbed, by vain longings. Pearl was become instead just such another as the wild rose, a thing of rude beauty, wholly primitive. It lay within the bounds of possibility that this freak—this throwback which had overcome the handicap of a loutish peasant ancestry—might acquire a beauty of mind as well as body. There was, as Kung saw things, no real beauty without an appreciation of beauty.

Now that sanity had returned to him, Kung was bitterly aware of his unwarrantable intrusion into the life of this darling of the Shanghai night world. He dared not allow her to return to Shanghai, there to blab the story of his own frailty and the humiliation of the robbery. It would be months before she could return to her life. There were, therefore, obligations on him to recompense her for the disruption of her life. The debt would be paid, he argued, if he could give her some measure of inner beauty to comfort her in the dark days ahead when outer beauty had faded.

There still remained the problem of what to do with Pearl's

brother. He, too, was a responsibility. If only for the good of his own soul, the young man must be punished. But how? He was a thief. Worse, he was a bungling thief. He must be taught the lesson which all had to learn before there was any happiness: that men take out of life what they put into life, and that the scales on which these things are weighed are balanced to the weight of a single hair.

Kung walked slowly towards an outbuilding where Pearl's brother had been lodged, slowly because the task was distasteful to him. He still felt too much animus against the young man for his part in the robbery.

"Tell me," he said in tones of courtesy which were, nevertheless, cold as ice, looking down at the young man who was shackled to an iron staple, "how you came to rob me and your sister. If you cannot speak the truth, it will be better for you to remain silent. Were you not taught that it is an impious thing to rob one of your own blood?"

"Did my sister betray me?" asked the young man hopelessly.

"You are here to answer questions, not to ask them. Yet I will tell you that it was your own stupidity which betrayed you. Why was it that your sister, who must have recognised you when you entered the room, did *not* betray you?"

"Because," replied her craven brother, "the plan to rob you was hers. I obeyed her orders."

"I love truth for its own sake," said Kung in a far-away voice, "yet I think I would despise you less if you had lied. So the plan which went somewhat astray was that of your sister? Afterwards, no doubt, when the hue and cry had died down, she would have joined you in Hongkong and there you would have divided the booty. Is that it?"

"That was the plan," said the young man sullenly.

"The plan to steal your sister's jewels as well as mine—was that your plan or hers?"

"That was my plan."

"You did not intend to keep faith with your sister?"

"I was frightened and I ran away . . ."

Kung turned away in disgust. In another part of the garden he found one of the guards. "When it is dusk," he ordered the man, "whisper to the young woman that her brother is

confined in yonder building. Tell her that you will—for a price, of course—allow her to speak with him for a little while."

A few minutes after dusk, glancing fearfully over her shoulder, Pearl went to where her brother was imprisoned. There was a little window above his head which the guard had indicated to her.

"So you were caught and chained like the vile thief you are!" Pearl whispered viciously through the window.

"If I am a vile thief, you also are one," said her brother. "The plan to rob the man was yours."

"You know it was not my plan to steal the jewels, only to force the old fool to pay Lok-wen for them and then, when they were recovered, to shame him into giving them to me. If you dare to tell him that I knew of the matter I will see to it that you are well beaten. The old fool will believe me . . . soon he will be like wax in my hands. It is I, not you, who can give him what he wants."

These two would have said much more if given the opportunity, but Kung, who had been listening to every word, had heard enough.

"Are you," asked Kung in a loud voice, "brother and sister, born of the same father and mother?"

"What has that to do with you?" asked Pearl impudently, encouraged by the mildness in Kung's voice.

"It has, as you suggest, nothing to do with me. I was thinking, as I spoke, of your honoured ancestors. I feel for them in their great shame. Because you have brought shame upon them, because neither of you is loyal to his kin, you must be punished. For you, young man, the punishment is simple. To-morrow you will be beaten. For your sister it is not so easy to find a punishment. . . ."

When Kung returned to the house there was a messenger waiting with a letter from his nephew in Shanghai, urging him to return as speedily as possible. To the letter he replied briefly in writing: "The captain of a ship on a stormy sea must find strength from within. For a little while I shall remain here among my roses until the early frosts take their beauty from them"

Matters in Shanghai were approaching a crisis. A great

campaign against Kung had been started in the press. Large rewards were offered if it could be proved that the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society accompanied its requests for subscriptions with threats.

Within minutes of having written a reply to the letter, Kung had forgotten the matter. For a little while his mind was on his roses, and to a lesser degree upon the brother and sister who were become a problem. Life was so short and beauty so rare that none of its savour must be wasted. The art of living was to discover first things and to put them first.

For the evening meal there was a pilaff of prawns, delicately flavoured with mushrooms, finely-shredded green peppers, a bare suspicion of garlic and a little pulp of tomato. It was a dish which demanded a clean palate and an easy mind. Kung always ate sparingly, but every dish had to be perfect of its kind. Being a civilised person, his tastes were varied and not necessarily confined to Chinese cuisine. He had eaten in his time the cooking of most nations, and in all except the German he had found something to his taste.

Long ago Kung had discovered the relationship between food and mood, often planning his diet according to the tasks which predictably lay ahead of him. Meat in any but the smallest quantities, he had found, dulled his sensibilities. Eggs tended to overheat him, warping a usually cool judgment. Too much rice made him do impractical things, accentuating the spiritual rather than the material which, in a very material world, was not always advisable. Although he drank the fine rice wines of China most often, he enjoyed at times heavy burgundies and at others fine Rieslings.

With the pilaff of prawns, which he had first eaten in Paris, he drank a glass of Riesling. As he sipped it delicately, he found himself in a gay mood, which for him was rare. A little fruit, followed by a mere thimbleful of old brandy, caused him to chuckle at his own thoughts. These foreign businessmen and finance moguls of Shanghai had seen fit to declare war on him. A good meal, a glass of a Rhine wine and a few drops of brandy, had between them helped him to fashion a potent weapon.

Western men of affairs, Kung mused, were excessively dull

people. They took themselves and their money-making so desperately seriously, glorifying their greedy scrambling in the market-places into a quest for something which they saw as almost holy. Money, always provided there were enough of it, was sacred in their eyes. They were its high priests, the neatly-dressed clerks and subordinates its acolytes. Where great sums of money were concentrated, the high priests of the cult created a hushed cathedral atmosphere, as though to hide their pompous absurdities from the world. They must, Kung decided, be made to look a little foolish. They would expect him to retaliate with some great gesture, which would serve to feed their vanity by the tacit admission that they were as important as they believed themselves.

In the house by the river, and elsewhere, in the care of the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society, were some very odd characters, whose talents of various kinds were growing rusty under enforced inaction. There were men who understood locks fully as well as their makers; others whose fairy fingers could charm valuables out of pockets almost, it seemed, without direct contact with their victims; to say nothing of experts who could change the clothes of two sleeping men without awakening them. All of this talent, thanks to Kung himself, had been idle for a long while, its possessors watched too closely to permit of any backsliding. It would be a pity, Kung mused, for such talent to die of inanition.

CHAPTER XI

THE return of Kung to Shanghai was timed to perfection, for few things enhance a man's prestige more surely than false accusations and rumours. He had been absent a month when the first frosts drove him from his rose garden. Meanwhile, the committee of the insurance interests had not been slow to suggest that Kung was a fugitive from justice, or had absconded with the funds of his Society, and in either event, would never dare to set foot within the International Settlement again.

In point of fact, Kung returned to Shanghai a full week before Shanghai was aware of the fact, arriving discreetly by house-boat in the middle of the night. The following week was spent in the privacy of the house by the river, investigating his nephew's conduct of the affairs of the Society during his own absence and making certain plans for the discomfiture of those who styled themselves his enemies.

As has been stated elsewhere, Kung was happy in the possession of many friends in many places. One of these friends lived in the Portuguese island of Macao, an island which derived its small prosperity almost exclusively from gambling, prostitution and opium exploitation, and was, certainly in the eyes of those who had studied history, a sad nether-end of the once glorious Portuguese Empire. It is, however, the friend who lived there, rather than Macao itself, which concerns this story, although it is difficult to mention the latter without falling to the temptation of moralising about it. It is, nevertheless, pertinent to add that there could be found nowhere in all the world, except perhaps in its chief capitals, so much human frailty, iniquity, corruption and degeneracy packed into so few square miles as were to be found in the Portuguese island of Macao. It is easily understood, therefore, that no man's reputation was enhanced by frequenting the place.

The Macao representative of the Shanghai Chinese-language newspaper *The New World*, one of the most influential sheets in all China, with a large circulation and exalted advertisement rates, believed that he had achieved a scoop, when an obliging acquaintance gave him the discreet tip that if he would go to a certain notorious gambling hell at a certain time, he would see none other than Kung, the President of the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society, occupying a chair at what was in all human probability the world's oldest continuous poker game and one of its largest. The diligent correspondent of *The New World* might have been disposed to be less enthusiastic and more cautious had he known that his informant was an old friend of Kung himself.

On the evening in question, the correspondent arrived in the gambling hell at about eleven o'clock. He only knew Kung by a fuzzy newspaper photograph, printed from a coarse-screen halftone, which portrayed him as tall and slim, with an aquiline nose. The six men seated at the "big table" were all fat, being prosperous merchants from Hongkong and Canton. In order to take a seat at all at this table, which had been in continuous play night and day for more than forty years, it was necessary to be prosperous. To draw cards for one hand frequently cost more money than many less fortunate men earned in a lifetime of toil. At a little after midnight, having no more ready cash, and being therefore of no more interest to the other players, a fat Cantonese merchant rose from the table and left. A tall, middle-aged man with an aquiline nose took his place at once and the game went smoothly on its way. The newcomer produced a satchel full of money, held his cards very close to his chest and, during the next two hours, caused beads of sweat to stand out on the foreheads of his five corpulent fellow players. Then, to their blank dismay, he gathered up his winnings and prepared to leave.

"I trust you will excuse me," said the correspondent of *The New World* in his most winning and honeyed tones, "but have I not the honour of speaking to the respected Kung? Here is my card. My newspaper would be interested in publishing any statement you might care to make."

"I am a private person, here for my amusement," was the

cold reply. "I do not care to make any statement except that I consider your newspaper to be a disgusting sheet, operated for the purpose of blackmail. If you care to publish that, I shall be most happy."

This was a vile slander, for the owners of the newspaper had given up blackmail some ten years prior to this conversation, on discovering that there was more money to be made by running it on orthodox lines. Its Macao correspondent, therefore, was highly indignant. He was even tempted to drop his courteous tones. "Our readers," he said, "will be interested to know that money donated for charitable purposes is spent in"—he swept his arm in a half-circle to embrace the crowded gambling hell—"places like this."

The tall, dignified man with the aquiline nose, who had neither admitted nor denied his identity, walked haughtily down the steps of the gambling house and was driven away in an open victoria. The correspondent of *The New World* made for the cable office, hoping that his despatch would arrive just in time for the following morning's edition. Let it suffice to say that his hopes were justified.

At ten o'clock on the following morning, with an English translation of the despatch on his desk, Gordon Burnside exultingly telephoned the other members of the shadow committee to call an emergency meeting.

"This," he said a little while later in committee, "is the end of Master Kung!"

Urged by Burnside to do so, the afternoon English-language newspapers played up the story for all it was worth, and perhaps a trifle more. A job printer, persuaded to drop everything else, delivered more than 100,000 leaflets containing a highly embellished version of the despatch, and by the late afternoon these were being distributed gratis in the streets, as the throngs of people returned from work to their homes.

On the following morning the English- and Chinese-language newspapers editoralised discreetly upon the subject. One of the former used the story as an illustration of the depths of depravity to which China had sunk since the Revolution. "When the latterday holder of the proudest name in all China," the newspaper said, "can so misuse funds entrusted to his care

by the benevolent-minded people of Shanghai, one is tempted to despair of brighter days in this unhappy land. One doubts, too, whether after this appalling disclosure, the bones of the Great Sage himself are lying easily in their resting-place. . . ."

Shanghai was a case-hardened city, having few illusions and not being given to outbursts of moral indignation, but this was too much. In Shanghai eyes Kung had always been a somewhat gallant figure, a Robin Hood, or a David, pitted against great and brutal forces. Most Shanghailanders, whether Chinese or European, had a sneaking regard for this descendant of the Great Sage, although few believed his claim to be authentic.

Among the many who joined in the chorus of condemnation were certain jubilant missionaries, whose efforts to "civilise" the Chinese have always been a little lame, since it has been a matter of common knowledge that this task was performed for them even before Confucius gave the final polish nearly 2,500 years ago. The news that the authentic, or false, descendant of Confucius was amusing himself at the cost of the benevolent in the gambling hells of Macao, was meat and drink in the sense that it reflected, however obliquely, upon the character and teaching of Confucius himself. Much the same kind of jubilation might be observable among enthusiastic Orangemen in the unlikely event that a Roman Cardinal were discovered living in sin with one of the chorus of the *Folies Bergères*.

So much righteous indignation was abroad in Shanghai during the twenty-four hours following these outrageous disclosures that it can only be a matter of speculation as to how far it might have been carried if, in the late afternoon sunshine, Kung himself had not been observed driving quietly along The Bund in an open carriage, apparently oblivious to the notoriety he had acquired. Since at that time the shortest possible time required for the journey from Macao to Shanghai was in excess of three days, it followed with a great certainty that whoever might have been playing big poker in Macao, as reported by *The New World*, it could not have been Kung.

When Kung returned from his drive to the house by the river, a knot of reporters was waiting for him. "What have you to say about the matter?" they asked him.

" What can I say, gentlemen ? " Kung replied mildly. " Since we all know that a man cannot be in two places at the same time, especially when those two places are many hundreds of miles apart, I feel that the report, like that of Mark Twain's death, was somewhat exaggerated. There is, of course, the possibility, gentlemen, that I have a secret flying machine. I am sure that if you ask Mr Burnside he will be able to tell you where it is kept. There is also the possibility that in his well-known zeal for reform, Mr Burnside might be able to shed a little light on the mystery of how I came to be gambling in Macao at a time when I was peacefully reading the Odes in my humble house by the river."

" Do you accuse Mr Burnside of having fabricated the story, Mr Kung ? " asked an English reporter.

" Of course not ! " replied Kung with a gentle smile. " Having suffered from unfounded accusations myself, I will not be so uncharitable as to make them. Mr Burnside has a most noble character. Even if he did not admit this himself, his righteous indignation was most praiseworthy. Let me content myself with saying : An enemy hath done this."

" What are you going to do about it, Mr Kung ? "

" Do ? What is there to do but pray for heaven's forgiveness on malicious tongues ? "

* * * * *

The return of Kung to Shanghai caused consternation in many quarters, for during the month he had spent with his roses rumour had run wild. That many of the rumours had been instigated by Kung himself was not apparent to the undiscerning, who were, as always, the many.

In an elaborate office in the Kiukiang Road the news of Kung's return was received gloomily by John Blackross, who, for the past weeks, had been meditating on the folly of offering violence to a mild-mannered Chinese gentleman with whom he had been rude and careless enough to collide. A few weeks previously John Blackross had been contemplating with great satisfaction his imminent retirement from business to a small estate in the north of Scotland, where the fishing was good

and the cares of life minimal. The vista, so pleasant to contemplate, had unaccountably receded.

In the course of some twenty years in China, John Blackross had made large sums of money as agent for that well-known specific, Dr Constantine's Miraculous Cough Cure, which enjoyed great popularity from Mongolia to Indo-China and from the China Sea to Thibet. At first it had arrived bottled from the factory in England, specially labelled for the China trade. Although it did no more harm than most patent remedies, the label was, in the opinion of physicians who should have known, the best part of the whole product. After several years, during which he had built up a substantial business, John Blackross persuaded the proprietors to ship him the cough remedy in bulk, installing a bottling and labelling plant in Shanghai and thus saving large sums in freight. Later still, when everywhere else in the world the demand for Dr Constantine's Miraculous Cough Remedy had declined almost to vanishing point, the China agency alone kept the business afloat. John Blackross thereupon acquired the parent organisation and began to reap a rich harvest. Since China had no troublesome pure food and drug laws, considerable economies were at once effected by withdrawing from the prescription the more costly ingredients (of which in any event there had only been microscopic quantities) and substituting other and cheaper ingredients, without noticeably changing the flavour or appearance of the stuff. Simultaneously, the already extravagant claims made for the remedy were approximately quadrupled, and it was advertised far and wide in China as a certain cure for tuberculosis, bronchitis, asthma and practically every other ailment to which the pulmonary system is heir.

All over the Flowery Kingdom, wherever underfeeding and poor housing conspired to help the ravages of tuberculosis, patient Chinese swallowed torrents of Dr Constantine's Miraculous Cough Cure with a sublime faith, even as they were coughing up pieces of diseased lung, that the promises upon the showy labels would be implemented. John Blackross, sitting comfortably in his Shanghai office, continued to count ever larger sums of money as they flowed into his hands. There is every likelihood that his dream of retirement would have been realised

within a few months—for plans were already afoot to sell the business to a public company—when John Blackross committed the supreme folly of his life. He had hit and kicked many Chinese during his sojourn in China, but hitherto he had always been wise enough to choose the humble and lowly for his victims.

A week after John Blackross's assault upon Kung the two unqualified Chinese chemists who superintended the mixture and bottling of the Miraculous Cough Cure in a dirty godown in Hongkew, felt impelled, for reasons which seemed adequate, to seek a change of occupation. When two candidates with better qualifications, willing to accept even lower pay, presented themselves for interview, John Blackross engaged them. The processes of manufacture of the Miraculous Cough Cure were so supremely unimportant alongside the sales and advertising organisation that John Blackross troubled no more about them. He gave them the formula, showed them where the ingredients were kept and put them to work.

It was unfortunate, however, that when these two young men got into the stride of their new employment, Kung's nephew, who was a former schoolmate of theirs, presented them with what he called modestly "a somewhat improved formula." It was still more unfortunate—for John Blackross—that one of the chief ingredients of this "somewhat improved formula" was a violent purge. By the time this was discovered, more than a million bottles had been distributed beyond recall. The two young chemists, furthermore, discovered simultaneously pressing family business elsewhere.

These things account logically, therefore, for the gloom of John Blackross as he sat in his elaborate office in the Kiukiang Road, contemplating the collapse of his dreams of honourable retirement to a fisherman's paradise. On the blotter before him lay a letter. It was from the head of the financial syndicate which, had things been otherwise, would have turned his business into a public company, leaving him with a large sum in liquid cash. In the smooth phrases used by those who deal in money, the letter said: ". . . and since your principal asset, namely, the goodwill of your business, can be said no longer to exist, it is my painful duty to have to inform you that we can no longer proceed as originally planned."

For the twentieth time that day John Blackross read the letter which was the death-knell to all his hopes. Its finality was crushing. In a wave of self-pity he forgot the poor way in which he had repaid China's hospitality, remembering only that everything had been swept away because of a moment of irritation. The scores of others, helpless and inarticulate, on whom in the past he had vented his spleen, were clean forgotten. They did not count. Nothing mattered beside the supreme ill-luck that for the first time in twenty years he had struck a man whose memory was longer and whose teeth and claws were stronger than his own.

As he sat there, taking stock of the situation, John Blackross realised the impossibility of proving anything against Kung unless, by some almost miraculous chance, he could find the two young chemists and, by whatever means necessary, extract from them a confession which would involve Kung.

There was whisky in the cupboard. Whisky always helped. Upon John Blackross, who boasted that he had been weaned to whisky, its effect was not precisely that upon most other men. Given enough of this potent spirit of the Highlands, some men become sodden and maudlin; others become quarrelsome; still others behave like wild beasts. John Blackross fell into this last category, with the exception that he became a cunning and intelligent wild beast.

After three or four stiff drinks he rang the bell. A Chinese clerk entered the room.

"Cheng," said Blackross, "I have just discovered that you forged my name to a cheque for two hundred dollars."

"But that was four months ago," said the wretched clerk. "I have already repaid half the sum. I do not understand . . ."

"I know nothing of any repayment, Cheng. I only know that a cheque forged by you lies in the safe yonder and that your father-in-law signed a bond for you before I would employ you. Nevertheless, I am prepared to forget the matter if, within forty-eight hours, you find for me the two young chemists who made certain mistakes. . . ."

"How shall I find them?"

"That is your problem, Cheng. Not only will I forgive you the forgery if you find them, but I will give you one

thousand dollars in cash. If you fail to find them, however, I shall send for the police."

Blackross knew well enough that even among the teeming millions of Shanghai there were ways of finding men. A European stood no chance, but a Chinese, with strong enough reasons to spur him, could find ways. Cheng now had the necessary stimulus. It was as simple as that.

Nine times out of ten John Blackross would have been right. But this was the tenth time.

Cheng was without doubt a forger. As such, it is not easy to defend his crime. But it did not seem to him just that the crime which four months ago he had admitted, and for which he had already been forgiven, with the proviso that he repaid the money, should thus be resurrected.

On leaving the office, therefore, instead of attempting to find the missing chemists, he went straight to the house by the river, where he believed he would find help in his perplexity. Within minutes of his arrival he was received by Kung in person. The latter listened attentively to what Cheng had to say, especially with regard to the search for the young chemists. "If you will obey my orders," said Kung, "all will be well. Remain away from your employment for forty-eight hours, during which it will be presumed that you are searching for the missing men. Return then to your employment and inform the man Blackross that your search has been fruitless. . . ."

"He will then inform the police and I shall . . ."

"Cheng," said Kung, "you must learn a lesson. Those who come to me for help must trust me completely, or not at all. There is no middle course. Which is it to be?"

"I will trust the respected Kung," said Cheng, feeling abashed.

When Cheng was gone, Kung rang a bell. "We have a guest," he said to his nephew, who answered the summons, "a certain Foong-wei, who passes also under other names. He was concerned in a regrettable matter when a safe in the French bank proved unequal to the task of protecting certain valuable papers and money. You will inform him that I require his peculiar skill to-night in a righteous cause. You will also inform him that if he bungles the task, he is quite unknown to me. . . ."

A little after midnight that same night, the entire contents of the safe in John Blackross's office lay upon a desk in the house by the river. Kung searched through the pile of papers until he found what he required. Among the papers was a small, cloth-bound account-book which contained certain very private papers, revealing beyond all doubt that Blackross had been involved for many years in the narcotics traffic which was eating the heart out of China.

Kung was now able to forget the wanton blow which Blackross had struck. Suddenly, it assumed proper proportions as the petty thing it was. As an opium addict himself, he knew the best and the worst of opium. Used with restraint, as he used it, opium's capacity for harm was much less than that claimed by the propagandists. But the deadly derivatives of opium, in which Blackross dealt, were capable of dragging men to the gutter in a few months. Kung knew now that he was very angry.

There were some ordinary account-books which dealt with Blackross's legitimate business. Taking a pot of red ink and a pen, Kung drew thick red lines across the pages which ended with the previous day's business. There was a deadly finality about the act. The business of Dr Constantine's Miraculous Cough Cure was, symbolically, in the past tense. It was over, finished and dead.

Painstakingly, drawing each letter as a work of art, Kung addressed an envelope to Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby. Into it he inserted the small account-book, upon the first blank page of which he wrote with similar care : " The private accounts of John Blackross." The rest of the papers he instructed the safe-breaker to replace where he found them.

When these things were done and he was once more alone, Kung spoke softly and in humility to the court of his ancestors who, he believed, watched over his least action, judging him where necessary harshly.

" How much of what I have done, honoured ancestors, has sprung from outraged pride and a human love for revenge, I cannot assess truthfully. Equally, I know that in some measure my actions spring from a desire for justice. I believe, my honoured ancestors, that even if this unclean man had not

struck me, I still would have proclaimed his infamy. But even as I say this, I know that had he not struck the blow he would not have incurred my enmity, and it follows, therefore, that I would have known nothing of his infamy. Might it not have been that the blow itself, arousing in me a desire for revenge, was a part of heaven's plan to punish an unworthy man? Might it not be that heaven made of me a humble tool to complete a pattern designed before I myself was born? I do not know the answer. I do not ask you, honoured ancestors, to award me virtue for what I have done. I ask only that it be remembered in my favour that my provocation was great and that the ends of justice are being served."

* * * * *

Like all good detectives of fiction, Willoughby sat with his back to the light, which streamed through the windows directly at his visitors.

"Well?" said John Blackross truculently, "I'm here. What is it that you want?"

"I'm glad you came, Mr Blackross. I think you will agree that it was to your interest to have a chat with me. . . ."

"Look here, Willoughby, my private misfortunes are my affair, unless you want to crow over me for having ignored your good advice. . . ."

"What advice are you speaking of, Mr Blackross?"

"You advised me to watch my step after having given that chap Kung a good clump on the jaw. I suppose you know he's . . . ruined me?"

"I'm very sorry to hear that," said Willoughby, who had heard nothing of the matter. "But, believe me, I didn't know of it. Nevertheless, it is funny that you should mention Kung, for I was thinking of him as you came into the office."

Willoughby was, when he chose to be, a good and sympathetic listener. He listened while Blackross poured out the tale of the perfidy of the two young chemists. "I'm amazed," said the latter, "that the story hasn't reached you. It'll be all over Shanghai before long. Between ourselves, I'm finished —financially, unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Unless a miracle happens," replied Blackross glumly.

"How is it you are so sure that Kung is behind this?" asked Willoughby. "Remember, you have other enemies."

"It's a Chinese trick—that's obvious. What other Chinese is smart enough to have thought it up? For that matter, who else could have engineered it all so neatly? I know—*know*, mark you—just as though I had seen him plant those two young chemists on me, the foxy bastard! You see, Willoughby," Blackross continued intensely, "I saw his eyes that day on The Bund. You didn't."

"I'm inclined," said Willoughby slowly, "to think that you are right."

"Look here," said the other sharply, "where's all this leading us? You didn't ask me to call to see you because of my troubles. You didn't know of them—or did you?"

"No, I knew nothing of the matter at all."

"Then why . . . ?"

"I'm coming to that, Mr Blackross," said Willoughby, reaching into a drawer. "I thought," he added, throwing down the small account-book which had arrived by the morning mail, "that you might care to explain—this."

"Where in hell did you get that?" roared Blackross, his guard down. "If you've opened my private safe, it'll cost you your job."

"So, it *is* yours, Blackross! I know nothing about your private safe. This little book reached me this morning—by post. Look!" He exposed to Blackross's astounded gaze the red-inked legend inscribed by Kung.

"What are you going to do about it, Willoughby?"

"That depends on you, Blackross. In three days' time I intend to hand it over to the British Consul-General. If you are here then, you know as well as I do what will happen. You'll be arrested. There'll be a trial and a dirty scandal, and on the facts, I would judge, you will serve five years in Hong-kong prison. But, if you are aboard a steamer, bound for home, I would say that the Consul-General would feel much about it as I do. . . ."

"And how do you feel, Willoughby?" asked Blackross in a dead voice.

"I'm British, and I'd hate to see a scandal involving a fellow-countryman. If you stay here, I'm bound to prosecute. If you're gone I'd feel like forgetting you, forgetting that you were ever born, and hoping that others would do the same."

"Three days isn't much, Willoughby," whined the other. "If I go within three days, I shall go penniless. . . ."

"How much had you when you came to China?"

"I hadn't a bloody shilling. I've worked hard, worked hard for more than twenty years. Don't be too damned hard!"

"You've lived well for twenty years, haven't you? If you leave without a shilling, then China will have treated you better than you have treated China. It's too late to talk like that, Blackross. . . ."

The hopelessness of his position dropped like a curtain across John Blackross's face. For more than a minute neither man spoke. Willoughby watched the other narrowly. He gave the impression of a man whose mind was racing at a mad speed to a conclusion. Now that he was no longer humble and pleading, he became less disgusting, taking on a certain dignity.

"I suppose," he said, rising to his feet, "you're expecting me to thank you for the three days. If you are, Willoughby, you can go to hell. Kung took that book out of my safe and sent it to you. . . . I'm going to have a little chat with Kung."

"Even if you could prove that Kung took it, which you can't, what good would it do you, Blackross? Even if this" —Willoughby tapped the small account-book—"didn't hang over your head, you're finished in China. Take my tip and get out—quick. There's nothing left for you here but bad trouble."

"A lot can happen in three days, Willoughby," said Blackross, moving towards the door, "a hell of a lot."

Willoughby pressed a buzzer under his desk three times. This meant: Follow the person who is leaving my office and report back to me.

Blackross went to his own office. With trembling fingers he opened the safe. As he expected, the papers which concerned Cheng's forgery were missing. The account-books were in a different position. He opened each in turn, going pale with

rage as he saw the neatly-ruled red lines at the foot of the last used pages. He knew then that those lines spoke the truth: that it was all over, that there was no comeback, that all hopes were vain and futile. He had known it before in his heart, but, because he was a fighter, he had intended to go on trying. Now, with those red lines swimming before his eyes, there was no longer any use indulging in self-deception.

At the rear of the safe was a revolver. He loaded it with slow, deliberate movements. Slipping it into a side pocket, he closed the safe, went out into the street and told his rickshaw puller to take him to the house by the river.

"I want to see Kung," he said to the boy who opened the door to him.

"I will see if my master can receive you," was the reply.

Seizing the boy by the hair, Blackross yanked him outside the door, walked into the house and began a room-by-room search. In a room on the first floor he found Kung sitting at a lacquered desk, writing. He appeared not to notice the intrusion and went on writing. Blackross used the brief pause to regain breath. With his left hand he swept papers and ink on to the floor, while his right hand went into his pocket to clutch the butt of the revolver. As he did so, he was seized by several pairs of hands.

"The impulsive and foolish Mr Blackross pays me a visit," said Kung. "With a deadly weapon in his pocket, too," he added as the revolver dropped to the floor with a dull thud. "It is strange, is it not, that although we two have met only twice, and once by pure accident, on each occasion you offer me violence? Have you nothing else but violence, greed and dishonesty to offer the world?"

Blackross quickly gave up the struggle with his captors, for a silken cord with a slip-knot was round his throat.

"I came here to kill you, Kung," he said through gritted teeth.

"It is one of the errors you people of the West make," said Kung. "You believe that others share your fear of death. It proves how very frail is your belief in the immortality you profess so loudly. I *know* that there is a place reserved for me in the court of my honoured ancestors, but you have no such

knowledge to sustain you. You merely echo parrot fashion what you are taught as children. You do not even believe in the hell which is so often on your lips, Mr Blackross. That is self-evident, or you would not have led such an unworthy life."

"You wouldn't talk so big, you yellow swine, if half a dozen of your servants weren't holding me. . . ."

"You believe that it is only my servants who prevent you from killing me? You are more foolish than I believed. My servants are holding you to save your face, Mr Blackross. See, I will tell them to release you."

Kung muttered a few sharp words in Chinese and the men at once stood apart from Blackross. The revolver still lay on the ground a few inches away from the latter's feet.

Ignoring Blackross, Kung took another bottle of ink from his desk, gathered his papers and continued his interrupted task.

"So many letters, so many problems!" said Kung a few minutes later with a wry smile. "Life at times becomes very burdensome. Recently, I took a brief holiday, but I am paying for it now. Troublesome affairs, letters and problems have piled up like water behind a dam. In a few seconds, with the help of that ugly weapon which lies on the floor, you could solve all my earthly problems for me, Mr Blackross. I have been weary of life these many years. There is none to hinder your purpose, Mr Blackross. There is your weapon. You have only to stoop to pick it up. . . ."

Blackross remained motionless, almost choked by the emotions which welled up in him. He saw Kung as through a red mist of hate, but his muscles would not obey the impulse to pick up the revolver and still the taunting voice for ever.

"You must forgive me, Mr Blackross," Kung continued, "if I fail to conceal my contempt for you. It is quite profound. Perhaps it would be easier for you if I turn my back. I once read a history of your Scottish clans. Assassination of helpless and unsuspecting persons seems to have been the traditional sport of your ancestors. There now, Mr Blackross"—Kung turned his chair and sat with his back towards the intruder—"nobody could be more accommodating."

The Chinese who had followed Blackross up the stairs looked at their master in wonderment. They did not understand

English, but the sense of the little drama being enacted was evident to them. They looked expectantly at the big man whose red face had now turned a dirty grey and after a few minutes their lips curled in contempt. Several whole minutes passed, during which Kung sat composedly reading a book of poems. Blackross began to sag as though with immense fatigue, and then, turning slowly towards the door, he left the room. Nobody spoke until the sound of the shuffling footsteps had died away and then only commonplaces were uttered.

"Take that to the man's office," said Kung, pointing to the revolver on the floor. "I suspect that ere long he will find a use for it."

"These Western barbarians," said one of the young Chinese, "have no true courage."

"A truly civilised person," observed Kung in reproof, "does not rate mere courage too highly. Some men are brave because they are too stupid to recognise danger. The buffalo and the wild boar are brave, if all you require of your fellow-men is bravery. Also, young man, no civilised person claims for his own race a monopoly of the virtues. That is false pride, the attribute of children. We Chinese honour our ancestors and, by implication, our race. It is right that we should honour those who created for us our culture, all we have and are. Honour is one thing, pride another. We do not choose our parents, so how can we take pride in them? Parents may take pride in dutiful children, as any man may take pride in his own handiwork."

"I thought," said the young man, looking greatly abashed, "that . . ."

"You did not think," retorted Kung, "or you would not have been so foolish. Although it does not seem apparent to you, there is a true culture in the West. When you are sufficiently cultured yourself, it will become apparent to you also. Come with me. I will show you something."

Kung led the young man into his own living quarters, where, on a pedestal in the corner of a room, were two figures of runners. carved from white marble. The figures were nude except for loincloths. Their faces were strained and drawn, like those of tired rickshaw pullers. Every ounce of effort was concentrated

in a final burst of speed as they ran neck and neck. Although frozen in marble, there was speed, life and movement in every line.

"It is very beautiful," said the young Chinese in a hushed voice. "I have never seen anything like it."

"It was carved in Italy from the white marble of the Carrara mountains," said Kung presently. "The man who carved it was a young English sculptor. He was proud of it. When he offered it for exhibition, it was refused. Judges of these matters pointed out that the hands of the runners were disproportionately large. They suggested to him that before he tried another work he should study human anatomy more closely. It was the last piece of sculpture that young Englishman ever attempted. Before he returned to his own country to study law, I bought it from him for a trifle. Mark well that this piece of sculpture, which you find so beautiful that your eyes are round with wonderment, was done by a man who was regarded by his fellows as a bungler and failure.

"Go out into China and find me one man who can equal this other young man's failure. This is not soft ivory, which can be carved with a knife. It is not jade, admittedly hard, which we Chinese carve into conventional shapes bearing little relationship to anatomy. This is marble, which is both hard and brittle. There was no room for error. Look at it well, young man, and from it try to learn a little humility. If this is a rejected failure of the barbarian West, use your imagination to envisage its successes. Claims to superiority are meaningless. Remember that. Superiority is a fact, or it is nothing. Go now about your work, and at some other time we will discuss superior men."

* * * * *

In a city hardened to strange sights and sounds, heads were turned towards two men who walked slowly along The Bund and, on reaching the corner of Canton Road, turned down this thoroughfare away from the river. The leader of the two, clad in sackcloth, played weird discords on a flageolet. The sound was infinitely mournful. Behind him walked a tall man clad in a long cotton gown of funeral white. He was carrying

a pillow of white cotton on which reposed some object wrapped in a similar material. To curious passers-by who inquired for whom they mourned, they deigned no answer, but continued slowly on their way As is the way of big cities, a crowd of stragglers began to follow, small at first, but growing with every minute.

These two strange figures, quite unmindful of the interest they had caused, entered the main doorway of a block of offices in the Kiukiang Road, and, still maintaining their steady pace, began to climb the stairs. The discordant notes of the flageolet echoed eerily on the stone staircase. Office doors opened as curious clerks peered out to see what was afoot, to be closed as quickly by those who, not understanding, preferred not to be involved, however indirectly, in this strange business.

The two men looked intently at a glass door on which was reproduced in exaggerated proportions a bottle of Dr Constantine's Miraculous Cough Cure. Opening the door, they entered the outer office, where a number of clerks was working. These last looked up in astonishment, although the events of recent weeks had case-hardened them against the unexpected. The mournful notes of the flageolet ceased abruptly when the head clerk demanded of the new-comers their business.

" We bring certain property belonging to the man Blackross, property left at the house of our master, the respected Kung."

The head clerk disappeared into an inner office where Blackross, maudlin drunk from the whisky he had consumed, was vainly trying to find a way out of his difficulties. Worse than whisky, he was far advanced in the state of self-pity, which lies at the end of a road on which there is seldom any turning back. When the first mournful notes of the flageolet struck his ears, Blackross had written down a long list of the names of acquaintances, wondering how many, if any, might be called friends. One by one he eliminated their names from the list until, as the head clerk entered the office, he was about to strike out the last. The awful realisation dawned upon him that in his passage through life he had not gathered to himself one real friend. The realisation accorded well with the jangling discordances of the flageolet, whose playing was resumed with the departure of the head clerk on his errand.

" Stop that bloody row outside ! " roared Blackross. " What do you want ? "

" A messenger has come from the respected Kung, sir. He brings some property belonging to you and wishes to deliver it personally. . . ."

" Who respects Kung ? " was the angry retort. " Do you ? "

The head clerk, who had endured years of bullying with submission, smiled as he said : " I have great respect for him."

" You're fired ! " said Blackross. " Get out. Take your pay and go to hell ! "

As he left the private office the head clerk motioned to the musician and the white-clad figure of Kung's messenger to enter. He stood watching, wondering whether the significance of it all would penetrate his ex-employer's fuddled wits. Bowing with great courtesy, the messenger entered the office, putting the pillow and the object wrapped in white upon the desk. In the doorway the notes of the flageolet rose to a hideous crescendo.

Blackross did not speak. He watched with agonised eyes as the messenger once more bowed, withdrew and closed the door.

For long minutes Blackross sat motionless, gazing at the symbolic white pillow. White, he knew, was the colour of mourning. Mourning for what ? They were terrible minutes, pregnant with the consciousness of being utterly alone in a world which regarded his misfortunes with light amusement. Kung had sent the messenger thus attired, Blackross mused. The errand, therefore, must have some unpleasant significance. He knew now that he was deadly afraid of Kung, afraid of the hidden powers he wielded, afraid of his icy contempt and afraid, too, of a silky tongue which carried cruel barbs.

What was it which this messenger from Kung had brought so ceremoniously upon a white pillow, wrapped in funeral white ? Some hideous jest ? More bitter humiliation ?

With trembling fingers, no longer able to contain his curiosity, Blackross unwrapped the heavy bundle, toppling out on to the desk his own revolver. He had forgotten that. He had wanted to forget it, to forget any reminder of his own bluster and the nerveless hand which would not allow him to carry out his intention.

Although they did not quite know why, nor what was delivered upon the white pillow, the clerks remained standing in tense expectancy. "I have been dismissed," said the head clerk, standing before the cashier's cage. "I will take my wages now."

"He was drunk when he dismissed you," replied the cashier. "In a little while he will change his mind."

"I will take my wages now and go, for he will never change his mind. In a very little while our employer—may he rot in the pit—will go to meet the barbarian apes who are his ancestors. As for me, I prefer not to be here when the police come."

Taking his money, the head clerk gathered a few small possessions and left the office. He was on the opposite side of the street when he heard the revolver shot. "I wonder," said a passer-by, "whether that was a shot."

"It is my opinion," said the head clerk, smiling happily, "than an unworthy life has just ended."

CHAPTER XII

In the main the rich Chinese disapproved of Kung, as the rich always disapprove of anyone who strives for social justice, on the not unreasonable supposition that the alleviation of injustice will in one way or another fall upon them.

For precisely the same reasons, the rich and reactionary foreigners considered it far more sound economically to execute Chinese thieves than to feed them and to try to turn them from the error of their ways. The rich and reactionary foreigners, although influential and powerful, were numerically insignificant, and throughout the rest of the foreign community there was a disposition to think of Kung as a good fellow with a very pretty wit, and provided he were not allowed to become too powerful, like such of his ideas and aims as they knew.

Then, again, the attitude of many Chinese was coloured by the fact that gigantic businesses, owned outright by British and American families, had been squeezing wealth out of China for more than a century and doing nothing for China or the Chinese in return. Privileges granted under the iniquitous treaties, which gave the major powers extra-territorial status, denied to China the right to tax any of the immense and incalculable profits which accrued to foreigners and were sent abroad every year to maintain princely establishments in other parts of the world. That it was old custom made it tolerated, but it did not make it good custom and was bitterly resented by enlightened Chinese, who believed that foreigners should be made to contribute something towards the treasury of a land on which they battened like leeches.

So it is that the task of making Kung fall into true perspective is confused by the fevered prejudices of his time and background. The suicide of John Blackross aroused mixed feelings. Those who had known him well in life felt bound by the convention

which demands that the evil a man does shall die with him, while those who knew him not at all believed he had been hounded to death by Kung for some real or imagined slight.

Among the very few who knew the entire truth was Willoughby, who, for his own good reasons, kept silent. Called upon by his superiors to express an opinion as to whether Kung could be held culpable for the suicide, Willoughby replied: "Kung did no more than return a revolver with which he himself had been threatened in his own house and which Blackross, probably from funk, dropped on the floor. I have yet to hear of any law which refuses one the right, when returning another man's property to him, to dress the messenger in any way one pleases. We may think what we like, but there was nothing criminal in what Kung did. There isn't a shred of evidence, either, to connect Kung with the tampering with the cough cure. Even if the two young chemists were to be found, even if they were fools enough to confess everything, we still couldn't convict Kung. My advice, for what it is worth, is to let the matter drop. Otherwise someone is going to look very foolish."

At the expense of Gordon Burnside's shadow committee of the insurance interests, the best legal brains were set to work on the problem of finding any illegalities in the methods adopted by Kung and his Society. But every legal light consulted gave it as his considered opinion that Kung remained strictly within the law. The most eminent of these lawyers, despite the large fee which he pocketed, delivered himself of the following caustic opinion, which he did verbally: "You cannot convict a man of extorting money by threats unless you bring conclusive evidence of threats. This you have failed to do. You cannot convict a man of obtaining money under false pretences, when his only promise is that in return for a charitable donation of agreed size he will with all due care and diligence protect the donor's movable property to the best of his conscientious ability. The evidence which you have put in my hands shows conclusively that Kung has gone a great deal further than could reasonably be expected in implementing his promises. Furthermore, there is ample evidence to support the contention that a small contribution to Kung's Society is

vastly more effective than an insurance premium, which at best only locks the stable door after the horse has bolted. Some people don't want money in exchange for their cherished possessions. Indeed, if it is of any interest to you gentlemen, I am allowing my insurance policy to lapse and have already agreed to contribute one-fifth of the amount annually to Kung."

This almost sacrilegious statement was received in shocked silence. It indicated a lamentable want of respect for Money. Well-mannered people, quite regardless of religious beliefs, when entering a Moslem mosque removed their shoes as a matter of courtesy. If the man who had uttered these heresies had not possessed a first-class legal brain, his flippancy in the presence of Mammon himself would have cost him several fat retainers.

Shortly after this unsatisfactory interview took place it came to Kung's ears that the men he employed as agents and collectors were being subjected to surveillance. Several of them, furthermore, were taken aside by strange men with ingratiating manners, who hinted very plainly that rich rewards would be forthcoming in the event that the allegation of extortion should be proven against Kung. Indeed, some of the proposals made were highly unethical, smelling strongly of subornation of perjury. But there was not, needless to say, anything which could connect such approaches with the shadow committee of which Gordon Burnside was the head, a committee which, every time it met, was more worried than on the previous occasion.

The more people who contributed to the Society's funds, the fewer the houses and business premises subjected to the dangers of robbery. Since there was what may be called an open season for thieves where premises not protected by the Society's chop were concerned, and the insurance companies bore these risks, the underwriting of burglary and kindred insurance had ceased to be a very profitable undertaking. To raise rates any further would be to cause more policies to lapse.

"It isn't any good, in my opinion," said Burnside at one of these gloomy meetings, "trying to trip Kung up in any illegalities. Frankly, I don't believe that the man is doing anything illegal. We've planted men right in the organisation,

and, except that the facts themselves are a threat, there isn't a shred of evidence to suggest that Kung, or anyone employed by him, threatens anybody with anything."

"In that event," said Cleghorn, who had once come to terms with Kung and still hankered to do so again, "isn't it about time we considered being a little more—realistic, shall we say?"

"It's always easier—more realistic, if you prefer the word—to give in to superior force," retorted Burnside coldly, "but if we admit ourselves licked now, we're finished. It isn't only one branch of insurance that's at stake. It's a case of the whole structure of insurance, as we know it, *versus* oriental banditry. The next thing would be that fire, marine and life insurance would be discredited. We've got to hang on somehow. Kung will make a slip and then"—Burnside smashed his fist down on to the desk—"we've got him!"

The meeting broke up reluctantly, for the sense of its members was less favourable to Burnside's attitude than ever. Burnside himself was a sick man. His usual good humour had deserted him. Kung had become an obsession, which haunted him night and day. Within the rules of the game he played he was an honourable man. Whether profitable or not, he adhered to his given word. He believed in the integrity of his own company and most other insurance companies. He regarded himself less as a large capitalist than as the custodian of the savings of the hundreds of large and small shareholders, who had entrusted him in some cases with everything they possessed. A thrifty man himself, he respected thrift in others. In all his beliefs touching upon insurance he was perfectly sincere, which explains the fanaticism which now had him in its grip.

Sincerity is a little understood human attribute. It can cause men to climb the peaks and plumb the valleys of human conduct. It is dangerous, because so hard to recognise with any certainty. The line which divides sincerity from pig-headedness, blind prejudice and demented stupidity can be, and often is, a very fine one. The famous road to hell is paved with the intentions of sincere men and women. The young Serb patriot who snuffed the candle of a Hapsburg archduke's life at Sarajevo in

1914 was probably sincere, but his sincerity did not spare Europe one iota of the thirty years of suffering which followed.

Gordon Burnside was sincere. What of it? Kung, too, was sincere. Both were, according to their lights, decent men. The one had Western decency; the other Eastern decency. If a time ever arrives when these two decencies are examined and compared dispassionately in an atmosphere free of prejudice, it may well be found that the chief difference between them is that the former is nurtured on wheat and the latter on rice. Neither Burnside nor Kung was able to see that the other strove for the same goal by a different road. But it was so. The world was steeped in savagery until man discovered that fire and water, instead of being enemies, were natural allies, for until the arts of cooking were developed there was little to distinguish man from the beasts of prey.

These two men, the Scot and the Chinese, were by inclination scrupulous, but their antipathy was to make them less so. Because of this antipathy there was to be a little laughter and a great many tears, and because laughter is so often remembered when tears are forgotten, the struggle between these two men is better, where possible, recorded in terms of the mirth it caused.

* * * * *

Since the part played in this story by Mrs Gordon Burnside was entirely passive, in the sense that upon her innocent shoulders fell much of the brunt of her husband's increasing nervousness and bad temper, it suffices to record that the poor lady sought for a few months in rural Aberdeenshire the calm and repose she could not find in Shanghai. She was in truth quite out of sympathy with what she termed her husband's crusade, undertaken at a time of life when he might reasonably have expected the pressure of affairs to lessen rather than increase. During the years spent in China she had acquired a more philosophic attitude to life than he had been able to learn.

The Burnsides were an undemonstratively devoted couple, but it was with a sigh of relief that Gordon Burnside waved good-bye as the big ship bearing his wife homewards pulled

out into the stream. He found her disapproval very trying, and he believed that what he had to do would be done better alone. The big house to which he seldom returned until well on towards midnight often gave off an aura of chill loneliness, but there were still compensations in the relative freedom which his lonely state permitted. Mrs Burnside, a very worthy woman, possessed a formidable tongue in conjunction with determined opinions.

Gordon Burnside was galled by the knowledge that the small committee he had been instrumental in forming had achieved precisely nothing. He was not accustomed to, and had little sympathy for, failure of any kind. His lifelong faith in direct action and direct attack was in process of being shattered. He would have been a good general in the days when opposing armies relied upon the shock tactics of massed assault upon solid walls of pikemen and archers. He would have borne himself well and bravely. But against Kung and the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society such tactics were laughably inadequate.

Since the insurance interests spent large sums of money in the English and vernacular press on advertising, the columns of the newspapers were largely open to his fulminations, although the editorial blue pencils were often called into use to delete highly libellous passages.

If during the time Burnside bombarded the press with warnings against the dangers of submission to "this quasi-criminal organisation which flourishes in our midst" there had been any serious increase in crime, or reason to believe that "authority is being set at defiance", more people would have taken his words at their face value. But the contrary was true. Less burglars, sneak thieves, godown robbers and kindred gentry were in circulation than ever before and the published crime statistics proved it. On the known facts the Kung approach to crime was a more effective one than any previously tried. The police-cum-insurance approach was both clumsy and brutal beside that of Kung, who diverted the activities of potential and actual criminals into other channels. "But how long will this last?" asked Burnside rhetorically. "This is only the lull before the storm."

To people who knew the facts this argument had little force. Its effect was to advertise far and wide the efficacy of the service given by Kung to the benevolent subscribers to the funds of the Society. It had a hollow ring like the legendary cry of wolf, wolf!

One evening, several weeks after his wife's departure for Scotland, Burnside returned home after midnight, exhausted by a long and somewhat wearisome after-dinner speech he had delivered to the not very enthusiastic members of the Chamber of Commerce and their guests. He had heard titters while he was speaking and sighs of relief when he sat down after no more than perfunctory applause.

There was an open fire burning in the lounge, a decanter of whisky stood invitingly upon a table beside his favourite chair, into which Burnside slumped thankfully. On the mantelpiece facing him was a framed photograph of Mrs Burnside, who, even when it was taken nearly twenty years previously, had looked a formidable woman. It aroused in this tired man a strange mixture of feelings. First, there was thankfulness that she was not at home to chide him, for he did not believe he could have endured her caustic remarks. This did not prevent him, however, from getting up from the comfortable chair to give the photograph an affectionate kiss. Despite tiredness, the knowledge of failure and the less than brilliant results of his speech that night, Gordon Burnside exulted inwardly, for he was now on the track of information which, if handled cleverly, might result in Kung's undoing.

It will be remembered that, on the morning after two robbers entered the house owned by Pearl of the Morning and stole valuable jewellery owned by her and that entrusted to Kung by Lok-wen the jeweller, the screams of the maid who found her mistress and her guest bound on the floor attracted a certain Detective Chang, who happened to be in the vicinity on other business. The disappearance of Detective Chang, immediately thereafter on a clumsily fabricated pretext, suggested quite clearly that it had been to someone's interest to spirit him away. That someone was, obviously, Kung, whose reputation might have been seriously jeopardised by the disclosure of what had happened.

Burnside had ascertained from Willoughby that there had been no organised search for Detective Chang. After a statutory period had elasped he had been stricken off the rolls of the Shanghai Municipal Police and forgotten. If he were ever discovered again in the International Settlement, some proceedings might be taken against him for absenting himself without leave, but in all other respects he had been written off as a bad debt.

Burnside had now discovered the whereabouts of Detective Chang and had further learned that he felt aggrieved against Kung, who, in compensation for his services, had given him $1,000 in full settlement and had thereafter resisted all demands for more money.

All this had come to Burnside's ears through a quite logical, although unexpected, chain of circumstances. The Shanghai General Insurance Company, in addition to many other activities, did a flourishing life insurance business all over North China. Although unknown to Burnside, Detective Chang had been at the time of his defection a life policy-holder in a small way. A week or so prior to the evening which finds Gordon Burnside sipping a whisky and soda in contentment before his wife's picture, a request had come from Hankow to transfer certain documents relating to a policy-holder named Chang to the Hankow office, on the reasonable grounds that the said Chang had taken up residence in that city, where he was become a detective in the police force of the British Concession. For reasons of family, it appeared, the said Chang had changed his name to Wing. This, however, presented no difficulties, because the fingerprints of the person to whom the policy had originally been issued were on file. If the prints of Wing ex-Chang checked, his identity was established.

Except for a long-established rule of the company that all, what might be termed, irregular cases came before him personally, Burnside would never have known of this changed identity, and had it not been for an excellent memory he would never have linked the case with the missing detective. A small bribe at the Central Police Station in Shanghai—for Burnside no longer counted upon Willoughby as a staunch ally—had secured the fingerprints of the missing detective and, since these

checked with the Hankow policy-holder, the identification was complete. That identification had been completed only a few hours previously. Hence Burnside's elation after what had been a not very satisfactory evening.

Gordon Burnside loved his own home, with its comfortable appointments, familiar pictures and all the sweet and pleasant memories it evoked. Its richness was more than a mere monument to material success. Everything in it had come from Scotland and there was no concession anywhere to China. It was not that Burnside dislike China, or the Chinese, for the contrary was true, but deep down in his Presbyterian soul was the belief that no concession must be made in the home to the charm and decadence of his temporarily adopted land. To Gordon Burnside his home was a little piece of Scotland. That it happened to be resting on Chinese soil was no more than an accident of fate. In spirit he had never left Scotland. Now he longed with a great longing for a bodily return.

Over the second and the third and the fourth whiskies and soda Burnside's imagination and thought roamed fancy free. He found himself thinking much of Kung, to whose undoing he was devoting his last years in China. Whisky mellowed him as it mellows most Scots. China had been very good to him, he mused. He had arrived almost penniless in the Flowery Kingdom. In the not-so-flowery Republic he was a rich man. With all their failings and peculiarites, there was a great charm about the Chinese. Indeed, it was their frank admission of human frailty which made them so lovable.

From thinking of Chinese in general it was not a far step to one Chinese in particular, so Burnside's thoughts began to centre once again on Kung, whose life was become so curiously entwined with his own.

Being entirely Western in outlook, Burnside had long ago decided that as between himself and Kung one of them was wholly right and the other wholly wrong. The sense that he was right and Kung was wrong had enabled him to pursue his steady course untroubled by moral considerations. Now, however, under the joint influences of fatigue and old whisky, Burnside was very mellow. He was not in any way drunk, but he was in that mood when his charity was wide and his

understanding large. Was there not, he wondered, even at this late stage, some way of compounding differences with Kung? Was there not some save-face formula, so beloved of the Chinese, by which the Eastern and the Western attitudes might be composed harmoniously?

Quong, whom Burnside knew to be an honourable as well as an intelligent and far-seeing man, insisted that Kung was not the brigand and opportunist he appeared to Western eyes, but that he was a staunch patriot, philanthropist and social reformer. Suddenly, as these thoughts passed through his mind, Burnside knew that he himself was very tired and that his soul was a little sick from the struggle. His own personal wealth was approximately halved because of Kung The shares of the company he had nursed to greatness, like those of other insurance concerns quoted in Shanghai, were being kicked about contemptuously on the floor of the Stock Exchange. Their current prices were accurate gauges of how people were thinking.

Burnside recognised this new mellowness in himself for what it was. He saw its dangers, saw how tempting it was to compromise with conscience, and tried to harden his heart for the struggle which lay ahead. Nevertheless, this rare moment of weakness had left its mark. Because of the tough race from which he sprang, a race accustomed to doing things the hard way, he would battle on, even if some of the heart had gone out of him.

Meanwhile, through Detective Chang, now called Wing, a chink would be found in Kung's armour. If there had been a jewel robbery staged at Pearl's house—and Burnside had no doubt of it—the hushing-up of the affair, which had probably involved the kidnapping of Pearl herself, convicted Kung of compounding a felony in the eyes of the law. With Kung safely behind bars for a while, the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society would founder and the Western insurance actuary would come once again into his own. With this happy vista before his eyes, Burnside went to bed. The last thing he remembered before sleep claimed him was the savage barking of a dog.

Some seven hours later, refreshed by sleep, Burnside struggled

reluctantly back to consciousness with an uneasy feeling that all was not well. There was a cool wind blowing on his balding head, to say nothing of a number of unusual noises. He still kept his eyes shut, as though unwilling to leave dreamland for the realities of the day ahead. He would have kept his eyes shut longer but for a disturbing sound which caused him to sit bolt upright in bed: the sound was that of a gust of laughter which, as he opened his eyes, became a roar.

It was for Burnside one of those rare bad moments in life when, for a few seconds, he was tempted to doubt his own reason. His bed, instead of being in the familiar bedroom, stood in the centre of a plot of vacant building land across the road from his own house. Hooked over a knob at the end of the bed was a chamber-pot, while on a bedside table reposed his glasses, his watch and chain and a tumbler of water containing his false teeth. Surrounding the bed were several dozen people, mostly Chinese, with a sprinkling of foreigners on the way to their work. Their numbers were swelling with every moment.

Even with the dull wits of a freshly-awakened man, Burnside recognised this as a means of making him look ridiculous, so he determined in the few seconds available to him to look as little ridiculous as the circumstances permitted. Stretching and yawning, he threw back the bed-clothes, fumbling with his feet for the slippers which, with great care, had been placed in their accustomed position. As though such things happened every day, he coolly put his false teeth in his mouth and, apparently not seeing or hearing the laughing crowd around him, walked in the direction of his own house, some eighty yards distant, pausing in the garden to pick a late chrysanthemum.

A Chinese crowd—in good humour—is a sporting crowd. The people gathered outside the house recognised for what it was Burnside's cool reception of the astounding business. Laughter turned swiftly to a hum of applause. It had been a good show of indifference.

Once inside the house, however, Burnside's composure deserted him, giving place to black rage. The front door stood ajar hospitably, but the house itself was empty. Every stick of furniture, every ornament, the carpets, the electric fittings, the

plumbing fixtures, and indeed everything movable, all were gone. On the gravel of the driveway outside the house were deep ruts where heavy vehicles had come and gone. The thieves had not even left him any clothes.

The telephone, curiously, was still in its accustomed position. Since there seemed nothing else to do, Burnside telephoned the Central Police Station, requesting the operator to find Willoughby. Seating himself on a built-in window-seat, now thoroughly chilled in his pyjamas, he waited with the best grace he could muster his rescue from the grotesque situation in which he found himself.

"Now," snarled Burnside, after shivering for more than an hour, "perhaps you'll take some action against Kung!"

"I don't think," retorted Willoughby equably, "that this is either the time or place to go into all that again. What you need is some clothes and something to warm you. . . ."

"What I need is to see Kung crucified!"

"Give me something which points to Kung and I'll have him under lock and key very soon. But before I can move, you know as well as I do that I need evidence."

"Who else could, or would, have done this?" snorted Burnside, accepting the loan of Willoughby's overcoat.

"The servants have all gone?" asked the latter, ignoring, because he understood it, Burnside's ill-temper. "Then let's get after them and find why they all decided to leave at once. But what beats me is how all this could have happened without waking you up. Do you feel as though you were drugged?"

Burnside shook his head. Just at this moment the loss of all his personal belongings was of less importance to him than the thought of the ridiculous figure he cut.

Chinese tailors work quickly when occasion demands. Twenty-four hours later Burnside, roughly equipped with the bare necessities for the journey, boarded a river steamer for Hankow, hoping as he did so that the tale of his humiliation had not preceded him up-river.

The problem at the Shanghai end was now for Willoughby to solve, and the unhappy insurance tycoon was thankful to escape from the laughter which, in his sensitive state, he was apt to hear in imagination. In Hankow, by hook or by crook,

he was determined to get from the former Detective Chang the evidence which would embroil Kung with the law.

Ten days after the stripping of its contents from Burnside's house Willoughby had made no progress. After some difficulty, several of the servants were found. All they would say was that on the evening prior to the occurrence they had all been instructed by the Number One Boy to leave the house. This they had done. The Number One Boy, who had been in Burnside's employ for many years, could not be found to verify or deny this statement. A score of people stated that they had seen removal vans outside Burnside's house on the night in question, but as there had been no apparent furtiveness or attempt at concealment, they had supposed everything was in order. Nobody had had a close view of any of the men concerned, or could give more than the vaguest description of the vans themselves.

In Willoughby's long experience it was the best organised crime of which he had any knowledge, but, even so, it must have a weak spot. In the ordinary sense of the word, it was less a crime than an obscene jest of the kind which commends itself to the robust Chinese sense of humour.

An English neighbour of Burnside's had returned home very late that night. This Mr Horton knew Burnside by sight and had exchanged casual greetings with him, but in no sense of the word was an intimate.

"I knew that Mrs Burnside had gone home," he told Willoughby, "so I thought that perhaps everything was being stored."

"But didn't it occur to you that two o'clock in the morning was an odd time to be moving?" asked the latter.

"It did, and I nearly telephoned the police about it . . "

"Why didn't you?"

"Because," replied Mr Horton, "it didn't look like a robbery. At the moment I passed the gate, I remember distinctly, four men in the hall—all the lights were on at full blast—were engaged in packing china and other breakables in straw. It was being done very carefully and the men doing it were experienced packers. That was what decided me against doing anything."

"Did you see any empty crates?"

" Yes ; there was a great stack of them in the garden."

There was not in Willoughby's mind, as in Burnside's, the least doubt that somewhere behind this matter was Kung. It was too elaborately staged to be the work of any but a large organisation, and since Burnside was the victim the inference was obvious. But this, as Willoughby well knew, was a long way from proof

There were other curious matters which required explanation. Thieves the world over are seldom careful in their handling of things. They are usually in too great a hurry to get their nefarious work done and be off. Nowhere in the whole of Burnside's house could there be found the smallest sign of wanton damage. Water had been turned off and the tanks emptied before the plumbing fixtures had been removed. This had been done expertly. Nowhere was there the sign of broken crockery. There was, on the contrary, the evidence of Horton that everything had been carefully packed.

Reluctantly, Willoughby came to the conclusion that this was not, in the ordinary sense of the word, a crime. It had all the earmarks of a gesture. Someone was saying, as plainly as in words : " So much for your vaunted police force ! So much for your foreign domination of Shanghai ! See for yourself what we could do if we were really disposed. We did not cut Burnside's throat, although it would have been childishly easy. Instead, we carried him out into a field and let him sleep. Does this look like the work of mere thieves ? Won't it occur to you that we are no criminal organisation ? We haven't turned really nasty yet, but this will give you the measure of what we could do."

Policemen, although there are some who will deny the allegation, are human beings. Willoughby was a policeman. On his desk, as he turned the problems over in his mind, was documentary evidence that with every week that passed, crimes against property in Greater Shanghai were growing less.

Only that same morning a rickshaw coolie had come to the Central Police Station bringing a wallet which had been left in his vehicle by a drunken foreigner. On being opened, the wallet contained a large sum of money. Because of the unusualness of the matter, it had been drawn to Willoughby's

attention. "There will be a reward," he told the coolie. "It is good that you were not tempted to steal the wallet."

"I was tempted," replied the coolie with a grim laugh, "but I resisted the temptation. I have a fancy to return to my village and grow grey hairs."

It would have been useless to press the questions. The implication was plain enough.

Because he was human and had his own interests to serve, Willoughby accepted with tongue in cheek the compliments of his superiors for the remarkable inactivity of the criminal element. But he knew full well that the hand which lay across the burglars, the sneak thieves, the pickpockets and the cargo pilferers was not his. There was another power abroad in Shanghai, a power which was going from strength to strength and which would at its present rate of progression soon supersede the police force.

At Burnside's urgent request there had been no statement made to the Press regarding the robbery at his house. There were, of course, whispers, and those who had seen him sleeping in his bed across the roadway had chattered, but he had been spared the humiliation of a full-scale disclosure in the newspapers. Willoughby himself had been glad enough to agree to this, for the circumstances did not reflect any great credit upon the vigilance of the police.

When he had gathered a little more information, Willoughby decided, the time was approaching for another talk with Kung. Some of his private thoughts on the subject of Kung and the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society should, he resolved, remain private, for they ill became a man whose strong sense of duty and forthright honesty had enabled him to climb from the bottom to somewhere very near the top of his profession.

The meeting with Kung was to be sooner than expected, and it was not to be of his own seeking.

CHAPTER XIII

THE crowd was in high good humour. Icy north-westerly winds which had plagued Shanghai for several days had given place to balmy winter weather. People streamed in their thousands to the great open space just outside the Chinese city, as many as could do so bringing their children with them, for there was an instructive and edifying spectacle to be seen by those fortunate enough to secure a close view. Vendors of sundry delicacies, balloons and other frivolities, did a roaring business.

Some people arrived in gaudily painted motor-cars, others in carriages in various states of decrepitude, still more on wheelbarrows on which they sat as many as three a side. Rickshaws thronged the roads in thousands, pedestrians in their tens of thousands.

Enterprising persons, after greasing the palms of various officials, had erected flimsy bamboo stands from which, high above the heads of the multitude, a clear view could be obtained. Here the best seats went for as high as ten dollars, which, bearing in mind that the great majority of the people in Shanghai earned very little more than that for a month of toil, was a large sum.

The crowd looked forward with eagerness to the coming drama, which was far better than the stilted synthetic drama of the stage, or the unconvincing cavortings of the flickering screen, which not long since had begun to claim Chinese devotees by the million. This was the real thing, the oldest drama of all: the drama of death itself.

What made the coming spectacle so wholly delightful was that nobody could, on the ghastly facts of the case, entertain the smallest sympathy for those about to die. There was, too, the excellent moral lesson in the thought that death was about

to overtake twenty-two cold-blooded men who had dealt out death to innocent men without compunction. Months had passed since their conviction, but the details of the massacre at the godown on the Yangtszepoo Road were still fresh in the mind of Shanghai.

A full four hours before the executions were due to take place, a dense crowd, running perhaps into six figures, milled around a small open space kept clear by soldiers, shabby little men in tattered drab green uniforms, who used the butts of their rifles as though they enjoyed it.

The twenty-two condemned men had been on the spot for several hours under close guard. Their unpopularity was such that there might have been difficulty getting them through the crowd. As it was, the shackled wretches had to endure much before death came to release them. Spittle ran down their faces and clothes, already filth-encrusted. For a few cents given to the guards, relatives and friends of those who had been murdered were permitted the privilege of spitting at the condemned.

As custom demanded, friends and relatives of the condemned men were present to give what comfort they could, but as they were almost all Pootung people, from the other side of the river, considered almost foreigners, they made themselves as inconspicuous as possible.

A great roar of disappointment passed through the crowd when it was announced that the execution was not to be by beheading, a method which had fallen into disuse with the Republic. In view of the hideous nature of the crimes, it had been expected that despatch would be by the sword. The old headsman had been, by general consent, a first-class man at his job and could always be counted on for a good show. A cheer went up as he was seen forcing his way towards the cleared space, waving his huge sword above his head and towing with him a goat, which bleated pitifully.

"This modern way with a pistol is a poor way," he roared to the crowd. "When you fill this"—he put down a galvanised iron pail—"and with some silver as well as copper and brass, I'll show you how we used to do things. This sword"—he flicked a fingernail against the steel, so that it rang like a

tuning-fork—" has taken off more than two hundred heads in its time, and, believe me, there was never a complaint from one of them."

The crowd loved this and a shower of small change was thrown at the bucket. A goat was not as good as a man, but it was better than nothing.

" I do not believe you can take off the goat's head with one blow, you old windbag ! " called one of the condemned, a truculent little man who probably had some European blood in his veins, for his face sprouted a heavy beard, and some of it was flecked with ginger.

Trembling with rage and indignation, the unemployed executioner came nearer to the condemned. The man who had spoken held up a shining silver dollar, just out of the other's reach. With a grin of triumph, hugely appreciated by the spectators, the condemned man ejected a great stream of spittle which struck the ex-headsman full in the mouth and trickled down into his beard.

In a little while, mostly with copper and brass coins, but with a good leaven of small silver amongst it, the pail was full. The goat was then brought forward to await its fate, forefeet tied together and kneeling in the time-honoured manner of condemned men.

Whirling the sword wildly round his head, the executioner, who was a very old man, severed the goat's head with one blow and then, under cover of the applause, disappeared into the crowd with his pail of money, while a helper carried the corpse of the decapitated goat back to the butcher from whom it had been borrowed for a consideration.

On the far outskirts of the immense crowd, waiting in a closed car with four Chinese detectives, Willoughby sat miserably while a squad of soldiers forced a passage with the butts of their rifles. His presence was necessary from several points of view, or he would not have been there.

Although the twenty-two condemned men had been sentenced by the International Mixed Court, no authority to carry out the sentence was vested in the International authorities. By agreement the execution of Chinese citizens devolved on the Chinese authorities. Willoughby's first task was, as official representative

of the Shanghai Municipal Council, to make sure that the twenty-two men about to be executed were in fact the same individuals who had been tried and sentenced. For a consideration it was always possible to arrange for substitution, and in the past this had been done on several occasions.

Willoughby was armed with twenty-two sets of fingerprints, and when these had been checked with fingerprints taken on the execution ground from the condemned men, justice could take its course.

The young army officer in charge of the condemned men, whose duties also included the carrying-out of the sentence, was too busy with a group of weeping relatives and friends to take much notice of Willoughby. He and his tattered soldiers were at that time owed some two years' arrears of pay, so they were making the most of the opportunity to pocket a little easy money.

Chinese law and custom on the subject of execution was less precise than that in Western countries. It gave a great deal of latitude to the officer charged with the gruesome duty. The law said in effect that on the agreed day at roughly the agreed time the condemned men were to be put to death. The method in vogue then was by shooting, but the law did not, like Western laws in certain matters, concern itself with trifles.

First to be settled was the order in which the condemned men were to be shot. Since there was among them a marked preference to be first, thus to be spared the sight and sound of the other executions, a brisk auction was taking place among the relatives and friends. In consideration of a cash payment of eleven dollars, paid to the young officer, pride of place was established. A lesser sum was accepted for the second place and still smaller sums for the privilege of being the third, fourth, fifth and sixth to be launched into eternity. After sixth place the bidding lagged, for the general opinion was that, having witnessed the execution of six men, the remaining sixteen would not care very much in what order they were despatched.

As the young officer was careful to explain to the friends and relatives, it lay within his power to have the thing done humanely, or otherwise. There could be a ten-minute interval

between each execution, or a ten-seconds' interval; a clean shot through the brain would mean instant death, while any little unavoidable carelessness might cause prolonged suffering. How, in other words, did each small group of friends and relatives want its own particular candidate despatched? A nice, neat, workmanlike job was guaranteed for five dollars, failing which anything might happen.

Eighteen five-dollar notes found their way into the young officer's pocket. The rest of the condemned had neither friends nor relatives.

"Will any charitably-disposed persons help these friendless men to an easy death?" asked the young officer. "Five dollars each will stop my hand from trembling."

Willoughby, almost overcome with nausea at the ghastly situation, fumbled in his pocket for some money, which he hastily handed over. "In heaven's name," he said, "get this thing done quickly!"

"Why do you concern yourself about the matter?" asked the young officer.

"Because the sentence of the Court was death—not torture. Shoot them and be finished with it!"

"The hour is not yet noon," was the indifferent reply. "More than thirty minutes of life still belong to these men. Who am I that I should steal twenty-two times thirty minutes from them? Besides, there is the crowd to be considered. If I were to take from them their pleasure, I would have a hard time. Also, who are you to interfere in such matters?"

"Do you not know," asked a mocking voice addressed to the officer, "that you are in the presence of the illustrious Willoughby, by whose genius all these men were captured and brought to justice? Be careful how you speak, my friend, for here is one who knows all, sees all and hears all. Wrong-doers tremble when they hear his name."

Willoughby turned round to find himself face to face with Kung.

"This is indeed a happy occasion, Mr Willoughby, and yet, considering that this is the culminating point in your great triumph, you do not, if you will permit me to say so, look happy."

"I don't happen to enjoy taking part in scenes like this,"

was the curt reply. "Furthermore, my conscience is not happy at the part I played in bringing these poor wretches to this fate."

"Conscience! Yes, I was forgetting that you enjoy this purely Western luxury. Surely, Mr Willoughby, you have no lingering doubts as to the guilt of these men? No doubt even, that when in a few minutes they meet the fate they so richly deserve, the world will be a better, safer place for law-abiding men and women? Then what can possibly trouble your conscience?"

"That they were betrayed to the executioner by a lawyer whose duty it was to defend them and that I, knowing something of the facts, kept my mouth shut. . . ."

"So you still retain your Anglo-Saxon affection for the forms of law and order. You amaze me, Mr Willoughby. You are ten thousand miles from the orderly pattern of life in England, where, I grant you, the system works. It does not work here."

While this exchange was going on the hideous bargaining continued, and the least concerned persons present were the twenty-two condemned men, from whom all hope had fled. During the lull in the arguments Kung stepped forward to speak to the young officer in charge of the arrangements, as he did so pressing a sum of money into his hand.

"The young man," said Kung, "is now ready for you to identify the men. A tent is being erected where things may be done privately."

Willoughby's detectives, under cover of the tent, took the fingerprints of the condemned men, contenting themselves with a thumbprint from each, and within fifteen minutes they expressed themselves satisfied as to their identities. Kung entered the tent with the party, and on each of the condemned he pressed a small cake, urging him to eat it. The poor wretches were hungry and ate the proffered delicacy eagerly.

"Now," said Willoughby to the officer, "I order you to execute those men at once."

"I give orders here, not you," was the surly reply. "This is China. You are come to see the execution. See it if you will, but do not interfere in things which do not concern you."

"These men," retorted Willoughby hotly, "are under

sentence of the International Court. I represent that Court here. If you do not begin the executions here and now, within a week you will no longer be an officer. That I promise you."

"This barbarian," called the officer to everyone within hearing, "seeks to cheat you of your sport."

An angry murmur went up from those nearest. It spread in ripples all over the vast open space. The Chinese detectives who had accompanied Willoughby were scared. They knew too well the danger if the crowd became ugly. Anti-foreign feeling was rife in China since the Republic and all China's ills were being freely attributed to malign foreign influence.

The tent was now taken away. The condemned men were being unshackled and re-shackled in the order called for by the donations of the relatives and friends. The soldiers did their work with needless roughness and with agonising slowness. It was fifteen minutes before they were in their correct order, individually shackled and chained in a long line by one chain, neck to neck, with some six feet in between each.

Drawing his revolver, the young officer shouted to the condemned men to kneel. They were slow in responding, but they were helped by brutal blows from the soldiers. The crowd had now forgotten that a foreigner had interfered. A stentorian-voiced man on one of the stands was giving a vivid description of events to those too far back to see.

Several of the condemned now slumped forward as though unconscious, sprawling on their faces. The young officer, who evidently enjoyed his task, waved to some friends on a stand. Holding his revolver at the back of the first man's neck, he pulled the trigger. The closeness of the flesh and bone seemed to dull the report, which sounded little louder than a cough. A soldier, to lend verisimilitude to the occasion, fired his rifle in the air. From the vast crowd went up a savage, "Ah!"

The next five were despatched quickly, in accordance with the bargain. Unhurriedly the revolver was re-loaded. A soldier, retrieving the empty cartridges, sold them for a trifle to an onlooker, only to find the revolver pointed at him. A loud laugh went up as he was compelled to hand over the proceeds to the officer, who lit a cigarette before resuming his hideous task.

Willoughby, who had thought himself equal to the horror of the day, had reached the end of his tether. Seized by a deadly nausea, he vomited shamelessly in front of the alien crowd. Although he fought against it, consciousness slipped slowly from him. He was spared the rest of the drama. He was spared, too, the knowledge that his sudden fainting had in all probability saved his life. Rumours that a foreigner was trying to spoil the sport of the day had circulated wildly in the immense crowd, which, its appetite for blood whetted, was capable now of any excesses.

His own detectives and two of Kung's men covered Willoughby with some filthy rags bought for a few cents from a bystander and, fighting against the pressure every inch of the way, carried him to the extreme outskirts of the crowd. Willoughby recovered consciousness almost at once, but he was still in the grip of the nausea which had caused his collapse and quite incapable of expressing, let alone exerting, his will.

"I thought," said Kung later as he helped Willoughby alight from the car in front of the house by the river, "that you would prefer to rest for a while under my humble roof until you are feeling better."

"My stomach," was the reply, "isn't as strong as I thought it was. That scene will haunt me as long as I live."

"Like so many other things in life, Mr Willoughby," said Kung when they were both seated inside the house, "it was not as bad as it seemed."

"I am ashamed of having made a fool of myself!" said Willoughby in disgust.

"Yet, if you will forgive the observation, I admired you more out at the execution ground than ever before . . ."

"For God's sake, why?"

"The task was distasteful to you, but you did it. Surely that is quite admirable? You showed great courage, too, before a hostile crowd. That also I find admirable. You proved yourself a humane man, if somewhat ignorant of our Chinese mentality. . . ."

"In what way ignorant?" asked Willoughby, bristling.

"You read the obvious from the faces and behaviour around you. I saw it in your eyes as you looked at me. 'This man

Kung,' your eyes said plainly, 'professes to be civilised, but the yellow beast is enjoying all this.' Tell me, without offence, Mr Willoughby, did not that thought, or one like it, pass through your mind?"

"Something of the kind, perhaps, yes," agreed Willoughby, somewhat embarrassed by the question.

"And yet you sadly misjudged both me and the crowd yonder. You saw but the surface. . . ."

"I don't need to be a sinologue to tell when people are enjoying themselves," retorted Willoughby irritably. He was now feeling better.

"But you *do* need to be a sinologue to understand *why* those people were enjoying themselves. People who have observed us superficially have often accused us of being cruel, but it is not so, Mr Willoughby. At the risk of being wearisome, I would like you to understand to-day and to have it in true perspective. I have been thinking much of you in recent weeks. I once thought that the gulf of misunderstanding between us was too wide to be bridged, but I am persuaded that I was wrong. Relax for a little and drink some tea while I try to build a bridge of understanding. Forget for a little while that you are an Englishman, remembering only that you are just a human being, the seat of whose emotions has been seriously disturbed."

Willoughby did as he was bid, at least in so far as relaxing and listening was concerned. He was grateful for the tea and reluctant to move. He was, too, intensely curious to learn what was in his host's mind.

He looked across at Kung, and as he did so a curious thought struck him. Kung's face was no longer a mask which concealed his true feelings. Upon it and in his eyes there was an expression of great earnestness, sincerity. The mocking look was gone from the eyes, as the mocking tones were gone from the voice.

"I wonder whether you will believe me, Mr Willoughby," said Kung, "when I tell you that out there to-day I, too, wanted to vomit, if for different reasons. Out there on the execution ground I was for a while godlike in my view of things. The pity and the tragedy of it all swept over me. With you it

was what you call squeamishness . . . Will you, do you believe me ? "

" Funnily enough," replied Willoughby slowly, " I think I do. But what does that prove ? That you, too, are a human being ? "

" Perhaps it is better that you understand the crowd to-day. Through me, because I am one of them, you may understand them. . . . It was a gay holiday crowd, was it not ? Even the children laughed. The people were rejoicing. To you it seemed as though they were rejoicing at the suffering of those twenty-two men, in bringing whom to justice you and I both played a part. They seemed to love the drama of it, the thud of shattered flesh and bone, screaming with delight as blood was shed. In your eyes they were no longer human . . . by your silence you acknowledge this. But it was not so, Mr Willoughby, however it may have seemed to you. The people were celebrating a great triumph, perhaps the oldest triumph in which humanity has pinned faith, without which humanity might often have faltered in the climb from savagery. I speak, Mr Willoughby, of the triumph of virtue over wrongdoing. There, while those twenty-two human fiends were being done to death, was the living proof that virtue triumphs. So, the people rejoiced. . . ."

" That's all very fine and large," interposed Willoughby, " but it doesn't explain away the ghastly haggling between the young officer and the relatives of the condemned. I haven't many illusions about my fellow men. Thirty or more years as a policeman have seen to that. But I didn't know that human beings could sink so low."

" Even that, believe me," said Kung gently, " was not as it seemed. Because it is old custom, I gave that young officer some money in order to be able to give the condemned men the cakes you saw them eat. Those cakes contained enough narcotics to kill all of them. The things which you saw done to death could not feel, could not see, could not hear and could not even suffer in imagination. What I did not know then was that I had been forestalled. The young officer himself had already drugged them . . ."

" Then why, for God's sake, that ghastly bargaining ? "

"Because we believe that the horror of such scenes is a deterrent. Because in order to impress such a scene upon the masses of the people it must be enacted horribly. The perceptions of the people," said Kung gently, "are not very acute. The drama was, as I said before, to illustrate the triumph of virtue and the punishment of the wrongdoer. It was a symbol, no more. It was not necessary that those men suffer, so they did not suffer. It was enough that they died. But it was necessary that the people—all of them potential robbers and murderers—should believe that they suffered. So there was played the ghastly farce which you saw. To-night in Shanghai hundreds of thousands of men and women will go to their beds resolved not to suffer a like fate. They have seen for themselves that the reward of wickedness is swift and horrible.

"You English play similar farces. Your judges don black caps in order to make the occasion of sentence more solemn to those who witness it. Your King rides through the streets of London in a golden coach to open Parliament, while your peers parade before the public gaze in archaic robes. The purpose of pageantry is plain: it is to impress upon the common people, who are often the ignorant people, that the King and the peers are not as other men, that theirs is some superior clay. Those who think know that this is not so, but out of such scenes is born respect for authority. But it is all mummery such as you witnessed to-day, and there is a justification for mummery if it carries a lesson."

"Why," asked Willoughby after a long silence, "are you telling me this? What are you trying to achieve?"

"I am trying to give you Eastern eyes, Mr Willoughby, so that you may see the East more clearly—so that you may see *me* more clearly. Looked at through Western eyes, I understand how I can be regarded as an extortioner and a danger to organised society. The impetuous Mr Burnside—according to his lights an honest man—has called me very ugly names, among them thief, bandit, blackmailer. I am none of these, but only a humble Chinese patriot who weeps for the sad state of his country and wishes to arrest the processes of decay and disruption. There is almost nothing I would not do, Mr Willoughby, to convince you of my sincerity of purpose.

Drive out of your mind the thought that I am being clever and that this is some devious exhibition of what you call oriental cunning. I am not appealing to you because of weakness—but because of my strength. I have created a force which, at my will, can make this International Settlement untenable by foreigners. I do not wish to use that force, nor am I uttering threats. To drive out foreigners would be merely to create a vacuum, which achieves nothing. To use the force I possess is to invite the use of force. . . . No, force will avail us nothing. Mine is a great experiment. The Society I have created is a good and moderate influence and will remain so while it remains under the control of a moderate man. In the hands of a violent or dishonest man it could become all that is said of it now—and more. But that will not happen. It will pass from my hands to other moderate hands—unless force is used against us. Then, I dare not predict what may happen. And so, I ask for your trust, your friendship. I hope that you will be able to give these to me."

"I cannot say now whether I can give you either, Mr Kung, although my inclination is to do so. My conception of my duty is not very elastic. There are things I am not prepared to condone, although when I make the effort I can see some things through Eastern eyes. The trick played on Burnside is a case in point. As a man I find it funny, although I have been greatly embarrassed by it. But as a policeman, you see, it is just one more crime. You may argue till all's blue, but burglary, even such a one as was staged to make Burnside look ridiculous, is stealing. And I am not prepared to condone stealing."

"I will not fence with you, Mr Willoughby, and pretend that I know nothing of the matter. I know what I know, and I assure you that nothing, nothing belonging to Mr Burnside, has been stolen. In a short while you will learn that I am speaking the truth."

"Burnside," said Willoughby thoughtfully, "is a very angry man. Even my friendship, if I were to give it to you, might not avail you against him."

"I fear," said Kung with a laugh, "that Mr Burnside will shortly be an angrier man. His journey to Hankow to find

a certain Detective Chang—who was so misguided as to leave the honoured service of the Shanghai Municipal Police without permission—is likely to prove somewhat disappointing."

"Is it wise to tell me so much?" asked Willoughby with a smile. "I have made no promises, remember. It is in my mind that if I had Detective Chang in the Central Police Station for a few hours I could persuade him to be very indiscreet where you are concerned, Mr Kung."

"You shall have the opportunity of putting your theory to the test, Mr Willoughby. When he calls, be sure to have him well beaten. A beating will be good for his soul. I am curiously Western in my disapproval of blackmail"

At least, Willoughby mused, he could not complain of any apparent lack of frankness on Kung's part. But was it real frankness? Or was it but the smooth lacquer of Chinese guile? Kung's manner had been impressive, and one thing he had said, more than any other, had appealed to Willoughby's reason: this Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society was as good, or as bad, as the brains which controlled it. Was Kung good or bad? That was the straight issue which had to be put to an unsubtle Western mind.

Some of the facts were beyond argument. His own work, Willoughby knew too well, was infinitely easier because of Kung, but that was not necessarily an argument in favour of Kung. A vast amount of inquiry had convinced him that the Society did not use threats to collect funds. Further, there was not a shred of evidence to suggest that the funds so collected were used for any other than their ostensible purpose. More than a dozen men whom Willoughby had "planted" in the house by the river, and the other establishments maintained by the Society, had failed to learn of any *direct* incitement to rob premises owned by persons who did not subscribe to the funds. The *indirect* incitement was, of course, always present by the known fact that the weight of the Society's hand would not fall upon thieves who robbed non-subscribers. Equally, insurance companies did not compensate persons who did not pay premiums.

It was very tempting to come to terms with Kung. The function of a police force was to prevent, rather than to detect

and punish, crime. The laborious methods of detection, the long-drawn-out processes of the law and the savage punishment of offenders were, viewed through civilised and enlightened eyes, the product of society's failure to provide for the underprivileged. The cost of these things was borne—and rightly—by organised society. Insurance companies, equally, levied tribute upon society as a further penalty for its own shortcomings.

Willoughby did not often indulge in philosophical discursions. He was cast in a plain mould. By instinct rather than reason he mistrusted all abstract thinking, all fanciful ideas. During the preceding summer, plagued by flies in his office, he had acquired a mechanical Japanese fly-trap. The thing had caught flies in thousands, but it had not relieved him of the torment of individual flies. In disgust he had thrown the thing away, falling back on the old-fashioned fly-swat, which had not been so effective against flies in general, but wonderfully effective against flies in particular. Somehow, although he could not see the analogy altogether clearly, there was a parallel between the Society and the mechanical fly-trap. Until he had sorted this out in his mind, Willoughby preferred to remain uncommitted.

"At least, Mr Kung," he said, preparing to leave, "thank you for your kindness to-day. I won't forget it. Let us have another chat soon."

"Do not delay too long, Mr Willoughby," was the earnest reply. "I feel that the impetuous Mr Burnside will before long make it impossible for my humble affairs to be discussed in an atmosphere of peace and detachment. I do not fear for myself—my fears are for Mr Burnside."

Willoughby, as he left the house, felt rather small and humble. Kung always had that effect upon him. Behind the Chinese façade of elaborate courtesy Kung radiated power, patience and calm. He seemed so contemptuous of a short-term view of anything that the pattern of time itself appeared to be woven into his being, as though in him the past and the future were linked to the exclusion of the present.

It was distressing to find, as Willoughby often found in Kung's presence, a constant reminder of his own lower-middle-class upbringing. By contrast, whether his claims to aristocracy

were valid or not, Kung was, by Western standards, as well as Eastern, a highly-educated and polished man. He could mix, and had mixed, in Western social circles closed to Willoughby. His knowledge of Western art, literature, law and some of the sciences was broad and deep, while Willoughby had the uncomfortable feeling that all he knew was how to be a good and conscientious policeman.

There was another troublesome problem, troublesome at least to Willoughby: that of racial loyalty. His thinking was not very clear on the subject. Was it, he wondered, an act of disloyalty to his own blood to support an Eastern institution against a Western one, even though it should happen that the former were a better institution? Then the further question arose: Was the Kung method of dealing with crime the better method? Or was it that he had been lulled by the immediate and obvious advantages into contemplating an alliance with Kung, whose good manners and lofty diction imbued everything he said and did with an almost other-worldly rectitude?

As a policeman, Willoughby knew only too well that charm and a façade of rectitude were the stock-in-trade of all the best confidence tricksters. To judge Kung and his works, therefore, only the bare facts were of any value.

Despite his gentle manner, Kung knew how to use claws and teeth. John Blackross, because of a careless blow, was in his grave in proof of this, but it was hard, nevertheless, to feel sympathy for John Blackross, even though he had paid the supreme penalty for a paltry crime against good manners and decency. There was no proof, but there were ugly whispers, of what happened to those who opposed their will to Kung's within the framework of the Society.

Willoughby knew only too well the temptation of glorifying the Robin Hoods of the world. Wrapped in the mantle of a little romance, it would seem so very right and proper to rob the rich in order to feed the poor, even though this struck right at the heart of the doctrine of *meum* and *tuum*.

Like many Englishmen of his class, Willoughby had always felt that insurance companies were, in the popular phrase, fair game. Otherwise honest men thought nothing of padding insurance claims, because of a widely held belief that insurance

companies made their profits by cheating the insured. Whether this were true or not, Willoughby mused, Big Capital such as they represented was always well able to look after itself, without help from underpaid policemen. It had been hinted very plainly by his superiors over the last months that anything which militated against the interests of the insurance companies was to be deplored. They had not said: "Right or wrong, this fellow Kung must be suppressed." But that was what had been meant. Authority had not seemed very much interested in the fact that the lessened crime of Shanghai was in large measure due to Kung, but had professed to be shocked that money which had once figured as "premium income" on august balance sheets was now diverted into filling empty bellies, whose owners, therefore, became less impelled to commit crimes against property.

Even as these last thoughts went through Willoughby's head, he knew they were improper for a good policeman, for was not the duty of a policeman to protect the rich against all efforts on the part of the poor to redress balances? The whole imposing edifice of Western justice made it quite clear that property was more sacred than human life. In far-off England once Willoughby had been responsible for bringing to justice a brute who had beaten two young children almost to the point of death. A judge had thought a sentence of six months' imprisonment adequate for the offence. During the same week two men who had printed five-pound notes of the Bank of England from a forged plate had been sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment, with a chorus of approval from the Press. Nobody could be blamed, therefore, for concluding that the sanctity of the Bank of England was forty times as important as the lives and well-being of two innocent children. How many times more important were the funds of insurance companies besides the lives of miserable Chinese thieves? Only an astronomer, Willoughby decided, could compute the answer.

Afternoon was turning into evening before Willoughby felt well enough to go to his office where, during his absence, there was an accumulation of matters requiring his personal attention. At various times during the day Gordon Burnside had left urgent messages, requesting Willoughby to telephone him

immediately he returned. But it was not until the latter had cleared his desk, by which time it was after nine o'clock at night, that he complied. He was growing a little weary of Burnside's importunities, resenting also his habit of trying to bring to bear pressure from a variety of quarters, all to the end that the activities of the police be concentrated on the suppression of Kung. In view of Kung's disclosure that afternoon, furthermore, it was not difficult to guess the nature of the communication Burnside had to make.

"I've got some news for you!" said Burnside when he was brought to the telephone.

Willoughby, who understood the value of being omniscient in the eye of others, replied: "I suppose you're going to tell me about having located my missing Detective Chang. Is that it? If you had mentioned the matter to me I would have saved you a trip to Hankow."

"Have you been having me watched?" asked Burnside, who believed he had covered his tracks perfectly.

"I watch everyone; that's my job. Well, what did you get out of Master Chang?"

"I've got a sworn statement that's going to make things very awkward for someone. Chang spilled the beans."

"It's going to take more than a sworn statement from Chang to pin anything on the someone you have in mind, I'm afraid," said Willoughby. "A good lawyer will soon make Chang remember that the statement was extracted from him under threats."

"If he goes back on the statement," said Burnside savagely, "then you can have him gaoled for a few months."

"Chang might prefer that, you know, to going for a swim in the Yangtsze sewn up in a sack full of stones. I've got a filing cabinet full of sworn statements here in my office, and they aren't worth a damn. I don't want to discourage you, but you'll need more than that."

"I've *got* more than that," replied Burnside, his voice alive with exultation. "I've got enough to put someone where he belongs—behind bars. I'd like to talk to you about it—now. Have you had dinner? If not, come and have some with me at the Club."

"Thanks! I'll do that."

It had been Willoughby's intention to put off seeing Burnside until the morning, but now he was curious to know just what he had uncovered during his trip to Hankow. Knowledge of this might make all the difference to him in making up his mind just how he and Kung stood in relation to each other. Willoughby—that is to say, Willoughby the policeman—found himself somewhat shocked to realise that Willoughby the man was hoping that on investigation Burnside's evidence might not turn out so damning as the latter appeared to think it.

* * * * *

Burnside had quite obviously "drink taken," although he was not drunk. It was equally obvious that he was in a highly overwrought state, as though recent events had been too much for him. His eyes were too bright, his hands twitched nervously and it was hard to reconcile him with the shrewd, calm, well-poised man of affairs whom Willoughby had always known. This new Burnside, it was plain, was capable of follies and rash judgments which the other would never have committed. Willoughby decided, therefore, to do a lot of listening and very little talking.

Almost in silence, although eager to talk, Burnside handed over to Willoughby a typed English translation of the statement made by Detective Chang, in which the latter told of finding Kung and Pearl bound and robbed at Pearl's house one early morning. He went on to state that he had been approached indirectly by Kung and offered a sum of money to get out of the Shanghai jurisdiction at once and to stay out until given leave to return. Fearing the consequences of refusal, he had fallen in with the arrangement. A separate statement told of finding Pearl and her servant at Kung's house on the Grand Canal, near Soochow, together with Pearl's brother, who admitted having planned and executed the robbery with his sister's knowledge and connivance.

Pearl herself, Chang had said verbally, was being held a prisoner and so great was her rage that he was sure that if given immunity she would testify as to her kidnapping and forcible detention.

"There's evidence enough," said Burnside, "that Kung

compounded a felony by denying the robbery; that he bribed a police officer to neglect his duty, that he kidnapped the girl within the limits of the International Settlement. The first charge isn't of much importance, but the other two are. On the kidnapping charge we ought to be able to get him put away for seven years."

Burnside called a boy. "Let's have another drink on it, Willoughby," he said. "But tell me," he added, the tone of his voice changing, "if you knew that Chang was there in Hankow, why in hell didn't you do something about it?"

"Chang thought he was safe there—safe from me and safe from Kung. It was best to leave him there until we wanted him. How long do you suppose it will be before Kung knows too? How are we going to get the girl away from Soochow? And her brother? We'll have to swear information to the Chinese authorities and have them extradited to Shanghai. The Soochow magistrate who will deal with the matter is probably a pal of Kung's. There'll be a delay, and during the delay your friend Chang will be got at, and when he gets into court—if he ever gets there—he'll suffer from a sudden loss of memory."

"You know, Willoughby," said Burnside, looking over the top of his glasses with an ugly expression on his face, and speaking very slowly and deliberately, "I've got a funny idea about you. I've had it for quite a long time now. It's an idea that wouldn't do you any good if it got about. You know a man in your job has to be very careful . . . after all, it won't be long now before you're due for superannuation . . . Can't be too careful, you know . . . Cæsar's wife and all that."

"Why not get this famous idea of yours off your chest?" said Willoughby, fixing his gaze on the other's right ear in a way which experience had taught him was highly disconcerting to most men. "Let's have it in plain English, if you please, without all this shuffling and evasion."

"Who's shuffling and evading?" said Burnside, raising his voice and passing swiftly, although he did not realise it, from the offensive to the defensive. "Living here hasn't turned *me* into a Chinese. . . ."

"Perhaps not, but you're still shuffling. Out with it, man!

Don't talk all round your subject. Let's hear this brilliant idea of yours about me."

"I'm not sure that I'll tell you—now."

"Perhaps it isn't so brilliant after all," said Willoughby, now determined, although he knew what was coming, to goad the other into indiscretion.

"Willoughby, my lad," said Burnside, relapsing into broad Scots, a sign that his libations were beginning to take effect, "for ma likin', ye're a trifle too pheelosophical about Kung. It's given me the idea that maybe this Benevolent Society of his suits ye fine, sae well in fac' that it wouldna surprise me to learrn that some o' Kung's benevolence had been scattered at the feet o' Chief Detective-Inspector Willoughby. Is that plain enough for ye?"

It was some six weeks since these two had met. There had never been any strong mutual regard, but there had never been such antagonism as Burnside now displayed.

Willoughby was about to rise from his seat and make his exit, when a club servant handed to Burnside an envelope, which the recipient slit open without apology.

It has been said that a good detective—and Willoughby was one—developes a sixth sense. Willoughby delayed his departure because he sensed that this envelope which Burnside was opening had some bearing upon their discussion. He was not, however, prepared for the scene which followed.

Burnside's eyes, as he read the contents of the envelope, which appeared to be a cablegram, seemed to bulge visibly. The high colour left his face and he went a deathly white. He dropped the cablegram on the floor and, seizing a massive ash-tray, hurled it to the farthest end of the fortunately deserted lounge. Then, as though he could stand no more, he began to weep. Burnside was in the grip of an atavism which carried him back across the centuries to the wild beginnings of his ancestry. His voice, quite incoherent, rose to a shrill whine. Odd words were audible to Willoughby, who found himself wondering where this usually staid man of affairs had learned them, for they were of that order which flourishes among the dregs of human society. Club servants, attracted by the noise, gazed at Burnside wonderingly.

"Don't you think you'd better calm down a bit?" said Willoughby. "You're rather conspicuous."

Burnside looked across the lounge where a dozen white-clad Chinese were watching him with amazement. The sight brought him up short. His rage turned swiftly to a mood of utter despair. "Read that!" he said numbly, pushing the cablegram across the table.

It was from Aberdeen and signed "Maggie."

"This is from Mrs Burnside?" asked Willoughby.

The other nodded assent:

> All our household belongings arrived here yesterday with unsigned letter saying you will follow shortly stop what does this mean stop shall I cancel return passage to Shanghai stop very worried cable immediately love
>
> MAGGIE

"It's the work of that triple-obscene Kung!" said Burnside through gritted teeth. "What in God's name am I going to do now?"

"There's a hint in the cablegram," said Willoughby coldly. "Why not take it?"

"Is that all you've got to say?"

Willoughby did not like being threatened and he could not forget that this man had threatened him. He resolved to spare Burnside nothing.

"No, Burnside, I've a lot more to say. I was just thinking —wondering."

"Wondering what?"

"Whether this really is Kung's doing?"

"Who else would have done it?" asked Burnside, his voice rising again to a hysterical pitch.

"That I do not know, but I do know what I *think* and what the rest of Shanghai will think when this gets into the papers. We're all going to think that Mr Gordon Burnside has been out East too long; that Mr Gordon Burnside had all his belongings sent home and then forgot about it after sleeping in a field with the gate open. . . ."

"Are you suggesting that I've gone mad?"

"No, Burnside, but the facts and your behaviour suggest it. In my report I shall describe your conduct as somewhat eccentric. . . ."

"You've no right to make a report without my consent. This is a private conversation."

"It's nothing of the kind," replied Willoughby gently, as though humouring him. "I am a police official. What you said was said to me in my official capacity. In so many words you accused me of being in league with Kung, hinting that I was taking money from him. All that's going into the report, too, and somehow, Burnside, I think a lot of people are going to jump to the same conclusion I've jumped to—they're going to believe that it's time you had a nice long rest. I'm sure the shareholders of the Shanghai General are going to think that—and your co-directors. What I think doesn't matter. I'm only a policeman, you see. I deal with facts."

"You wouldn't do that to me, Willoughby. Why, man, that would be ruin! What have I ever done to hurt you?"

"I don't know, Burnside. I just know what you threatened to do. Go ahead and be damned to you! You may as well say elsewhere what you've said to me, because it's all going in the report—every last word. Furthermore, I shall insist upon an official inquiry to clear me of the charges you have made. It will clear me, too, but what it will do to you I leave you to guess."

"Sit down and have a drink, Willoughby. I was hasty; I'm sorry."

Willoughby was by now on his feet. He stood, with a look of amazement on his face, gazing down at Burnside. Then with a laugh he walked out of the Club.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE had been a time, when she was ten years of age and being prepared for her career as an entertainer, when Pearl had put away her needles and silks thankfully, believing that the long hours of tedious embroidery were finished for ever. Now, laying down the frame and surveying her work, she realised with amazement that it had given her some satisfaction. The silk cushion cover, which in her blind rage she had torn to shreds, was restored beyond the power of an ordinary eye to tell that it had been damaged.

During the weeks of inactivity the delicate task had soothed jangled nerves, satisfying, although Pearl was not articulate enough to be aware of it, the creative urge which lies at varying depths beneath the surface of almost all human beings. It was almost with regret, therefore, that she realised her penance was completed.

It was a beautiful thing, this restored embroidery. No wonder, Pearl mused, with a reminiscent giggle to herself, that Kung had been angry. He thought her no more than a little savage, incapable of doing such fine work. Well, this would show him that he was wrong.

Although it was late autumn, the sun was warm and it was very pleasant to sit in this lovely garden beside the Grand Canal. Night frosts had killed most of the roses, but in sheltered corners a few still bloomed. From where she sat Pearl watched while a huge barge, heavily laden with massive Soochow pottery, came into view around a bend in the canal. Its immense lateen sail, like a russet-coloured venetian blind, caught just enough air to give the barge steerage way, so that the crew, instead of toiling with oar and towline, lazed smoking on the after-deck.

Acting upon a sudden impulse, Pearl ran into the house,

returning with a large sheet of paper and a piece of charcoal. Before the barge should continue on its way and out of sight, she hastened to capture the graceful lines, doing so at a moment when the Great Pagoda of Soochow, looming on the horizon, was just visible over the after-deck.

The barge swept off across to the far side of the canal and in a few minutes was out of sight. But Pearl, looking critically at her handiwork, realised exultingly that with a few swift strokes of the charcoal its lifelike outlines were safely prisoned on the paper. Running to the farthest corner of the garden, she caught one final view of the barge in an effort to fix in memory the warm russet tint of the sail. It seemed almost providential that at that precise moment a sycamore leaf fluttered to the ground at her feet, for the leaf was of exactly the same shade. No purpose had as yet formed in Pearl's butterfly mind, at least no conscious purpose. Returning to where she had left her drawing, she pinned the leaf to the sheet. Although she did not know it, for the first time for many weeks her eyes were bright with excitement.

In one corner of the garden, set well back from the Grand Canal, was a shed where her brother was still imprisoned and where, on the rare occasions she went near the spot, he breathed threats and imprecations at her through the broken window. It would be a long time before Pearl's anger against this perfidious brother cooled. Indeed, she doubted whether she could ever quite forgive him for the trick he had played on her. He was, nevertheless, a great problem.

Before he went away Kung had allowed her to decide the details of this brother's punishment. "I will have him beaten, or I will pardon him," Kung had said. "The decision is yours."

"He should be well beaten!" Pearl had replied savagely.

"And after that?" Kung had asked.

"After that he should be kept chained up where he is."

"Then, since he is to be beaten," said Kung, "there is no time like the present time."

Accordingly servants had brought her brother out from the shed where he was imprisoned and, removing most of his clothing, had tied him face downwards to a long table.

" Beat him," Kung had told the servants. " Go on beating him until his sister tells you to stop."

Whereupon, seizing a long supple cane apiece, two servants, one on either side, began to beat the young man, whose howls soon rent the still air. After twenty strokes, the men looked to Pearl for instructions. She, feeling the need to harden her heart, remembered the jewels her brother had stolen, and remained silent. The beating then began afresh, and when a further twenty strokes had been administered the men looked to Kung for orders. In their opinion the young man had had enough.

" This," said Kung with a shrug of indifference, " is a purely family matter. Let us not interfere. His sister will tell you when in her good judgment the young man is adequately punished."

Pearl's animosity against her brother was now slaked by the sight of the beating, but she could not bring herself to say the word which would end it. So the two servants, greatly wondering at this unsisterly conduct, for they knew nothing of the crime which prompted it, laid on with a will for a further twenty strokes. By this time the howls had turned to groans.

" Enough ! " cried Pearl. " Perhaps this will teach him to rob his own sister, the child of his father and mother."

" Do you wish him freed, or do you wish him to be chained in the shed again ? " asked Kung.

" Chain him up like the dog he is," replied Pearl, adding with practical foresight, " Think what he would do to me if he were free ! "

Now, weeks after Kung's departure, the problem of what to do with her brother was one of Pearl's chief worries. He was still chained up in the shed, mercifully chained, but securely enough to prevent his escape.

Putting a stone on her drawing so that it should not blow away, Pearl went over towards where her brother was imprisoned. Seeing her at the window, of which a pane was broken, he burst into a torrent of entreaties. Upon the graves of his ancestors he swore that, if only she would give the word to free him, he would not harm one hair of her head. Instead, he would go to some far place, never to trouble her again.

"If I thought I could trust you, brother," she said thoughtfully, "I would give them the word to free you. I do not want to see you again. Also, you are beginning to stink abominably in this place. I trusted you once, remember, and as a result I lost all my jewels. I do not think I shall trust you again."

"But that was in a moment of madness," pleaded the young man. "My love for you is such that I would not do you harm—not even after the beating I received, when you would not give the word to cease. No, it is not against you that my anger burns. It is against the man Kung. Help me to get free—merely tell them to unshackle me and let me go—and I promise you that I will exact for both of us a bitter revenge."

"Unhappily, your promises mean nothing, brother," said Pearl, quite unmoved. "Besides, what has the man Kung done to earn your hatred? You robbed him, did you not? But for him you would have gone to prison for years."

"Last time you came here," said her brother in a changed tone, "you yourself were swearing vengeance against him. What has happened to change your mind?"

To this Pearl did not deign to reply. The question, nevertheless, caused her to think furiously as she walked away. This brother was become a problem. But, on seeing again the sketch of the barge, Pearl at once forgot him so completely that he might never have existed.

Although she had caught the outlines of the sailing barge very well indeed, Pearl was aware that it was beyond her capacity to complete the picture with brush and paints. She realised this regretfully. It was then that she was seized by the desire to make the picture by embroidery.

Hitherto, hours spent with a needle had been just so much work, and as such to be avoided. Now, by some strange processes which she ill understood, there was pleasure in the task. There lingered in her mind, too, the cutting, contemptuous things Kung had said to her, making it clear that he regarded her as an ignorant, low-born creature, unworthy of notice. The words had left a sting, although the exact context of them was beyond her. What a gift the man had for saying contemptuous things! How small one felt under the lash of his tongue!

Pearl looked around her cautiously, as though she credited her guardians with the ability to read her thoughts, for a Grand Design—much better than the Great Plan, which had proved somewhat less than great—was hatching in her mind. The guards, who had formerly patrolled the garden day and night, were no longer conspicuous. Doubtless they hid somewhere, because Kung, she knew, left no loopholes in his orders. Indeed, she had grown to regard him as a man of almost superhuman cunning, as witness the neat way she had been tricked into allowing the beating of her brother to continue so long. She was glad, of course, that he had been beaten, but forty strokes would have sufficed. What he would do to her, if he had the chance, was something she did not care to contemplate.

Pearl did not believe the guards had relaxed their vigilance, but she did think there might be a way of outwitting them. On the side of the garden farthest from the canal, beyond the wall, there ran a narrow road, much frequented by wheelbarrows. By climbing up the rough bark of a mulberry tree, which she believed she could do with ease, there was a way on to the wall. It was worth trying.

There was a little money in an inner pocket, so Pearl resolved to take the chance. Putting the russet sycamore leaf under her tunic, she climbed the mulberry, taking care to remain hidden by the massed boughs. In a few minutes a coolie came into sight, pushing an empty wheelbarrow.

"How much," she called down to him, "will you charge to take me to the city?"

"Thirty cents," was the prompt reply.

"That is too much. I will pay twenty."

After some minutes of brisk bargaining they compromised at twenty-five. Pearl jumped down into the coolie's outstretched arms and was soon on her way.

"Whereabouts do you want to go in the city?" asked the coolie.

"What city is it?" countered Pearl.

"You mean to tell me that you live here in this place and do not know that yonder lies Soochow?"

"Nobody ever told me the name of the city, so how could I know?"

"Have you never been there?"

"Never. I do not even know the name of this place. I came here by water in the night."

"So," said the coolie, a bright thought striking him, "you could not even return to the place where I found you unless there were someone to guide you?"

"That is true," replied Pearl. "But you will bring me back, so all will be well."

"The price for the ride to Soochow is twenty-five cents," said the coolie with a grin, "for I am a man of my word. But the price for the return journey is five dollars."

Thereupon, and for the next several minutes, Pearl told the coolie things about his pedigree which he had never suspected.

"It is strange," said the coolie meditatively, "that you come from a house which appears to be that of decent people and yet you curse like a whore. Where did you learn to say such awful things?"

"Make me a reasonable price for the return, and I will tell you."

"For three dollars, and not a cent less, I will bring you back—if you tell me how you learned to swear so terribly."

It was an outrageous price, more than the coolie could expect to earn in a whole week, but Pearl saw no choice but to agree. At least her flow of vituperation had saved her two dollars. "I learned to swear like that," she told the coolie, "when I was six years of age."

"Who taught you?"

"Another dirty, lousy, stinking, misbegotten son-of-a-bitch of a wheelbarrow coolie—just like you!"

This was the kind of jest the man understood, so with a gay laugh he quickened his pace. "If you'll make me laugh on the return journey," he said with a chuckle, "I'll take a further fifty cents off the price. Now where is it that you want to go?"

"Take me," said Pearl, "to the street of the silk merchants."

It was a good hour before Pearl found the exact shade of embroidery silks she required. The search was very exciting. The russet of the leaf she was able to match exactly. For the hull of the barge she chose a dirty grey, like that of sun-bleached wood. The water of the Grand Canal that day had been *eau-*

de-nil, very easy to match, but the undoubted triumph would be the warm russet of the lateen sail against the yellowish hue of the bamboo slats.

In another shop, which dealt exclusively in silks by the yard, she found a piece of fine heavy silk of the palest sky-blue, so pale that there could be no clashing of colour. She was now in a fever to be back at the house and to begin the work.

When the coolie was trotting easily, just clear of the city limits, Pearl said to him apropos of nothing : " I am a thought-reader. I can tell any man's thoughts."

" Not women's ? " asked the coolie.

" They are more difficult. I seldom succeed "

The coolie digested this thought. To have a flow of language and to be a thought-reader must be a very rare combination in one so young.

" I do not believe that you could read my thoughts," he said at length.

" If I cannot read your thoughts some time before we return to the house," said Pearl, " then I will pay you double the agreed amount. If, of course, I can read them, then I pay you nothing. Is that fair ? "

" To me it seems fair," agreed the coolie. " It is a fine house you live in," he added with a change of mind.

" It is a fine house," Pearl agreed, " but too large for a girl living alone."

" Alone ? Time must hang heavy on your hands . . ."

" Sometimes, yes ! On my return now I shall sit and watch the traffic on the Grand Canal. It is very beautiful. Then I shall go to my room by a staircase outside the house. There I shall take a warm perfumed bath. Then a servant will come to rub me all over with sweet oil until my skin is softer than the finest silk."

" That must be very fine," said the coolie reflectively. " I think my woman must rub buffalo dung into her skin. That is what it smells like sometimes. Then what will you do ? "

" Then I shall send my servant away and I shall lie, with no clothes at all, upon a rich satin divan. There will be coloured birds singing in a golden cage and I shall think and think and think."

" What will you think about ? " asked the coolie, quickening his pace.

" I shall think how very fortunate it was that I remembered to put strong iron bars on the doors and windows to keep out the wheelbarrow coolie who planned to pay me a visit. . . ."

" How did you know that ? " asked the coolie wonderingly.

" I told you, did I not, that I was a thought-reader ? "

" Indeed, yes, but I had forgotten."

" But I did not forget, and now—am I not a lucky girl ?—I owe you nothing for the ride."

" That was the agreement," said the coolie bleakly, setting her down at the gate, " and now I see what a fool I am. I shall have to go home to my woman and see that she takes a perfumed bath. Nevertheless, I am not sure that our agreement was a fair one and that I have not been tricked."

" Nobody tricked you," said Pearl demurely. " You have been punished for thinking evil thoughts ; that is all."

" I think," said the coolie judicially, " that for all your talk of being a thought-reader, you are merely an expensive whore. Otherwise, how could you have known what was in my mind ? No decent woman could have known."

Pearl was feeling happier than she had felt for a long time. Part of it was due to the pleasant sunshine ; part to the brisk exchange of indelicacies with the wheelbarrow coolie. But there were also other reasons. These she did not fully understand. Nevertheless, she gave the coolie a silver dollar, which was twice what he could have expected, and sent him on his way happy.

It struck Pearl as strange that the gate should be open, Hitherto there had always been a heavy padlock on it. However, as it saved her the trouble of climbing over the wall, she wasted no time in speculating upon the matter. Looking around to see whether her absence had been observed, she set to work at once in the now fading light to prepare the design for her ambitious embroidery. The piece of silk she had chosen was a delight to handle, but most thrilling of all was the perfect matching of the silk for the barge's sail.

Pearl had been brought up to believe in signs and portents, so the falling of the leaf of the exact right shade at the very

moment when she was pondering the matter naturally assumed a great significance in her mind.

It seemed to Pearl as she ate her evening meal that the servants, hitherto so cold and aloof in their manner towards her, had relaxed somewhat. There was a dish of Mandarin fish, fresh caught from Lake Ta Hu, grilled slowly in its own rich fat and served with a delicate sauce compounded of Ningpo prawns.

"I think," said Pearl, going into the kitchen afterwards, "that was the best dish I ever ate in my life."

"Perhaps," said the old cook, who was father to Kung's own personal cook and had taught the latter all he knew, "it tasted so because it was eaten with a simple heart."

Usually Pearl snapped back at cryptic remarks such as this, for she did not like those who talked in parables. Now she replied with a quizzical smile: "As I digest the fish, so I will try to digest the thought."

As she left the kitchen Pearl saw smiles exchanged between the servants, wondering greatly at them. She did not know that for many days she had been free to come and go as she pleased, nor did she know that by returning voluntarily she had enabled the old cook to win a bet.

The winter that year bid fair to be exceptionally mild. This enabled Pearl to work in the garden upon the Grand Design. She felt impelled, like a painter, to face the actual scene as she had first seen it, so she sat among the last sad blooms of roses with a view across the water to the Great Pagoda of Soochow. Having seen this now at close quarters, it had assumed a new beauty in her eyes, so that instead of portraying it as a small dot on the horizon in true perspective, she had decided to use an artist's licence and to bring it more into the foreground, so that it appeared to be just on the far bank of the canal. Pearl had never heard of artistic licence, which gave the idea a touch of originality, causing her to tremble with excitement as she decided to put it into effect.

The gardeners, as the Grand Design progressed, formed the habit of pausing in their work from time to time and looking over her shoulder at the embroidery frame. The warm appraisal in eyes which had formerly looked so coldly at her was its own

reward. "One day," said the oldest of the gardeners, "your great-grandchildren will look at that and will boast that it was done by their respected great-grandmother. It will be a fine day for you."

"A lot of good that will do me!" laughed Pearl. "I shall not be there to hear them."

"And yet," was the grave reply, "there would be little beauty in the world if everyone thought like that. Someone, long centuries ago, rescued my roses from being just wild things with single petals. Succeeding generations trained them. These are all forgotten men. Although I am but an ignorant man, I think that every time someone drinks in the beauty and the fragrance of the roses, those forgotten men smile in their heaven. My rose garden will live after me. My respected father was, although an ignorant man like myself, strangely wise. He would always say that beauty was the only thing which never died."

"Men have called me beautiful," said Pearl wistfully.

"Lustful eyes sometimes see beauty where it is not," said the old gardener. "Sometimes they fail to see it where it is. Lust is very strange," continued the old man with no thought of being personal. "To me it is like a mist which comes up across the canal. It soften the outlines of harsh things, giving ugliness a false beauty. But that," he continued, looking at Pearl's downcast face, "is the kind of wisdom which comes to old men like me when it is too late to be of any use."

"I don't want to be wise when I am old," said Pearl petulantly. "I want to be wise now."

"Then go on with your stitching and allow an old man to go on with his work."

Encounters such as these set Pearl thinking, an unusual exercise. For the first time in her life she wondered about so many things. She wondered most of all why the people of the house, the indoor servants and the gardeners, were now so pleasant. Was it, perhaps, that they had received instructions from Kung to change their manner towards her?

Then, except for the guard who came to feed her brother, she found that she was free to come and go as she pleased without surveillance. Why was this? More than all, why,

when she was now quite obviously free, did she not avail herself of freedom and go? There was, of course, the embroidery to be finished. That was it.

"Tell me," Pearl asked the guard one day as he was coming from giving her brother his noonday meal, "do you think I have anything to fear if my brother is released from his shackles?"

"Yours is a strange family if you cannot answer that question better than I can. Try the experiment. If he is troublesome, it will be a pleasure to beat him—for I do not like the young man—and chain him up again."

"That is true," said Pearl reflectively. "Then unshackle him. But before doing so, would it not be a good idea to beat him a little?"

"It will be enough," said the guard, "if he is shown the stick. He must be washed, too, for he stinks abominably."

Later that same day, bathed and clad in fresh clothing, Pearl's brother emerged blinking into the afternoon sunshine.

"If you so much as lay one finger on me," Pearl warned him, "I shall have you beaten and chained. This time it will be two hundred blows and not sixty."

"I am so weak I could not hurt a baby."

"I am glad!" retorted Pearl, continuing with her Grand Design.

It was a few days after this that Detective Chang, freshly come from Hankow, arrived stealthily by night. Now Chang knew a certain part of the story, but a long way from all of it. He knew, for example, that there had been a robbery and that Kung and Pearl were its victims. But what he did not know was that Pearl's brother, together with another, was the robber.

In some respects Chang was an unpleasant fellow: the trade of detective fitted him too well. He was small and wiry, very agile and possessed of sharp ears. Such small success as he had attained in his chosen career had been on account of these qualities, with the addition of a false air of guilelessness, which lulled others into verbal indiscretions. He operated upon the terrifyingly cynical belief that human nature was even worse than it was, and by assuming for the lightest human actions the basest motives, was sometimes pleasantly surprised to find

his appraisals wrong. He had given a good deal of thought to the matter of the robbery at Pearl's house and, being quick to realise how very embarrassing the exposure of the details might have been for Kung, had been warned by his sixth sense that all was not as it seemed.

From the very beginning Chang had suspected that Pearl knew more about the matter than she admitted. Probably, somewhere discreetly in the background, was an accomplice, who had planted the stolen jewels in a safe place, which was a logical explanation of why Kung kept her and her servant prisoners. Ultimately, Pearl would point the way to the accomplice, and for a man as experienced as Chang the rest would be easy.

Two uncomfortable and dangerous hours spent hanging on to the main stem of a creeper outside Pearl's upper floor bedroom in the small house beside the Grand Canal convinced Chang that his theory was the right one. He heard many snatches of the conversation which passed between Pearl and her brother, and these convinced him that the unknown accomplice was none other than the brother. Nevertheless, it was hard to reconcile the relatively luxurious life of these two with imprisonment. They comported themselves like guests.

It was at this juncture that Chang's low opinion of his fellowmen led him into his first serious blunder. Knowing Kung to be very shrewd, he jumped to the conclusion that the only possible explanation of this comfortable retirement to the country was that the brother and sister were blackmailing him.

In Hankow, through Burnside's influence, Chang had been given indefinite leave from the police force. His instructions were explicit enough. "Bring me evidence that will convict Kung," Burnside had said, "and I will put five thousand dollars into your hands on the day he is convicted. Best of all would be to convict him of the kidnapping of the girl Pearl. The manner of bringing this about I leave to you."

Now, with an adequate sum of money for expenses, Chang had come to Soochow, prepared to secure the necessary evidence by any means which might present themselves. He still remembered with anger Kung's contemptuous rejection of his further demands and, with the prospect of revenge, in addition

to a large sum of money, he would allow few scruples to stand in his way. The chief danger lay in the fact that Kung was well able to look after himself. The Society of which he was the head had long arms—just how long Chang could only guess —and, when needful, sharp claws. He was well aware of the risks he ran.

Taking advantage of the open gate, Chang came to see Pearl in the guise of a beggar. He found her in the rose garden. "I have come," he said in a somewhat theatrical whisper and manner, "to rescue you from this place."

Young and not very worldly-wise as she was, Pearl's experience thus far had taught her that altruism was an exceedingly rare thing. At various times rich men had told her she was far too beautiful to perform for a vulgar public, offering to translate her to some higher sphere. But it had always transpired, on investigation, that the bed of a rich man was an inescapable preliminary. She was curious, therefore, to know what lay behind Chang's offer.

"What is it to you?" she asked bluntly.

"With your help I can put this Kung behind the bars of a prison. On that day there is to be a large reward. This I will share with you. He seized you by force and brought you to this place, also your brother. In Shanghai that is a serious matter. With this Kung in prison you will have nothing to fear."

"Nevertheless," said Pearl, who wanted time to think, "I fear this Kung greatly. Come here to-morrow at this time and we will talk of the matter again."

That evening Chang contrived to meet Pearl's brother alone. He, remembering his beating and the rough way he had been handled, was more enthusiastic. The more he thought of Kung in a prison cell, the more delighted he was to co-operate. There was, however, his own part in the robbery to be considered.

"I fear," he told Chang, "that this Kung will make a false charge against me if I appear in Shanghai. He will say that I took part in the robbery."

"Even Kung," said Chang, his voice pregnant with righteous indignation, "could not make so vile an accusation. If he did nobody would believe him. Besides, your sister was robbed.

Her word in such an event would be worth that of fifty Kungs. You must remember that I am employed by a foreign barbarian who has great influence. Even the police obey his orders. I can promise you on his behalf that, no matter what Kung may say, the police will not touch you."

"You were talking to my sister this morning. I watched you from the window. For the future it might be as well to let me deal with her. I am her brother, and, of course, she respects me as a sister should."

"Doubtless," said Chang sweetly, "she confided to you all I said to her, as a dutiful sister would?"

"Of course!" was the stout reply. Nevertheless, he was distressed by the knowledge that she had said nothing, and Chang, noting the far-away look in his eyes, concluded that as between brother and sister the latter was the one to be relied on. He had also noted that the guards who had been in evidence on his previous visit to the house, on the regrettable occasion when he had come to blackmail Kung, were no longer there. These two, therefore, were evidently free to come and go. That they did not go was a circumstance which required some explanation. Chang reflected uneasily that the relationship between these two and Kung was hard to understand.

There was an acrimonious scene between Pearl and her brother that evening, when the latter demanded why she had not confided in him the circumstances of Chang's visit. "Here is a chance," he said, "not only for you to return to your magnificent employment in Shanghai, but to take a very proper revenge upon Kung."

"We will fall in with this Chang's plans," said Pearl after some thought, "but we will do so in my way and not yours. I have not forgotten that you are a great thief, and, even though you were ten times my brother, I shall not hesitate to denounce you to the police if you play me tricks."

Thereafter the negotiations with Chang, which took place over several days, were conducted exclusively by Pearl, which was very strange in a land where a sister's prestige was roughly that of her brother's old sandals.

The imminence of their departure for Shanghai reminded Pearl that her Grand Design was far from completion. During

every daylight hour which remained, therefore, she toiled at this self-imposed task.

"In one evening in Shanghai," said her brother contemptuously, looking at the embroidery, "you can earn three times the sale price of that. When it is known that you were kidnapped by Kung your price will be three times as high as it was. Your name will be blazoned in every newspaper. Tens of thousands will flock to hear you sing. Why waste time on this miserable stitching?"

"Why did you waste time picking pockets when you might have been an honest, hard-working man?" was the uncompromising retort. "When I have finished this work," said Pearl in a manner which ended discussion, "I will go to Shanghai."

"Your sister is quite right," said Chang, who believed himself to be a skilled tactician. "This is a thing of great beauty, and it is important that it should be complete before anything else is undertaken."

If Pearl had harboured any doubts before, she now had none that Chang was up to no good.

The realisation of many things was slow in dawning upon her. She wanted to finish the embroidery, but this alone was not what was keeping her chained to the house beside the Grand Canal. The truth was that she had grown to love this easy, gracious way of life, the subtle aura of good taste which pervaded everything. She was even able to understand, in a way which would have been impossible a few months previously, Kung's affection for his rose garden. The good manners of everyone around her now—her own brother excepted—had at first been an irritant, because she had believed it to be mere affectation. Furthermore, without being obtrusive about it, the people of the house, in addition to good manners, radiated goodwill. It was all so strange and new that it had required digesting. Having digested it and found it to her liking—although even now there were times when she wanted to laugh—Pearl was not enthusiastic about returning to the blatant vulgarity and common ostentation of her milieu, which had once seemed so very grand.

Curiosity played a large part also in Pearl's reluctance to

return to Shanghai, curiosity to know, for example, why the close imprisonment had been relaxed and, since the need for imprisonment was now apparently ended, why she was still permitted to enjoy the hospitality of Kung's house as an honoured guest. It seemed improbable that Kung was still infatuated by her beauty, for if this were so it was hardly likely that he would have spoken to her so contemptuously. Men who sought to seduce used smooth phrases, whereas Kung had treated her as a guttersnipe. Most remarkable of all was the fact that although she had endured so much at Kung's hands, Pearl found her resentment dying with every day that passed. Somewhere in her uncomplicated soul she had made room for a realisation of her own shabby behaviour. Now, on due reflection, she had come to the conclusion that the Great Plan, which had once seemed so foolproof and excellent, had certain ethical drawbacks. In fact, viewed in this light, the charming of Kung and the faked robbery seemed somewhat shabby.

For a long while Pearl had found it impossible to explain —even to herself—her habit, several times daily, of scanning the Grand Canal for the arrival of a certain houseboat. When and if Kung came she would, naturally, pretend to be displeased, or, at best, indifferent, but the fact was, and she knew it, that her disappointment was caused by his non-arrival.

A few weeks previously she would have fallen in enthusiastically with Chang's plan to send Kung to prison, but the anticipation of revenge grew daily less sweet. Somehow the thought of that handsome, grave-faced man toiling at hard labour with common criminals offended Pearl. The fact that she understood about one quarter of his high-flown diction was, she now had the justice to realise, the fault of circumstances. It must, she mused, be wonderful to be able to use long words so easily.

Everything, in short, seemed different, and what Pearl failed utterly to realise, because of her limited understanding of people and events, was that the greatest of the differences was in her own self.

To attempt to recapitulate step by step the mental processes by which Pearl arrived at her conclusion would be a lengthy

and unprofitable task, for the said mental processes were not distinguished by their clarity. Let it suffice, therefore, to say that while she sat in the rose garden one golden autumn afternoon, putting the finishing touches to the embroidery, she realised that this was a mere part of the Grand Design to which she had put her hand, scarcely more than a prelude. The Grand Design itself, as befitted its name, embraced wide, more dazzling horizons, so wide and so dazzling that she scarce dared contemplate them.

What a fool that brother was, she mused as her fingers flew over the embroidery, to suppose that she would sell this for money! How blind he must be not to see that this was in truth a very part of herself. Here, stretched upon its frame, was living proof that her own hands had created from a piece of plain silk a thing of great beauty. Even the little wave at the barge's cutwater was true to life, whereas the *laodah* of the barge himself could find no least fault with the lateen sail, either in form or colour. When Kung saw this—if he ever saw it—he would no longer dare to call her by the ugly, biting names which, even in memory, made her wince.

On the day when the embroidery was finally completed there was a private viewing by the house servants, the gardeners, her brother and ex-detective Chang. All were loud in their praises, the last two especially, and falsely so. It suited Pearl, nevertheless, to give the appearance of being deceived, for these two, although they did not know it, had their appointed places in the Grand Design.

Before the private viewing, which took place in the garden, was over, a somewhat harsh note was struck by the arrival at the gate of the same wheelbarrow coolie who had taken Pearl into Soochow to buy the silks. At the time she had enjoyed his coarse humour, but that had been then. Now it was slightly different.

"Because of you," said the wheelbarrow coolie, after he had duly admired the embroidery, "I found myself in serious trouble."

"I am not sure that I wish to hear about it," replied Pearl haughtily.

"When I reached my home that night I told my woman

that I should like her better if, instead of smelling like a water buffalo, she smelled of perfume. What I did not know was that a neighbour had seen you riding in my wheelbarrow, and now, believe it or not, I am accused of wasting my money on expensive whores. To keep her quiet I bought her a small flask of a very strong perfume. She used it all at once—and it cost eighteen cents—and you may believe me that she still smells like a water buffalo, only a perfumed one. What should she do to smell better?"

"The first thing," replied Pearl, struggling between outraged dignity and laughter, "would be to get herself a clean husband instead of the unmentionable obscenity she was unlucky enough to marry, who will get himself thrown into the canal if he doesn't keep his dirty mouth shut. . . ."

There were a few more delicacies of speech for good measure before the amazed coolie took the hint and his departure, but shocked looks were exchanged around the garden, which somewhat damped the triumph of the occasion. "The trouble with men of that kind," Pearl said demurely when he had gone, "is that they take advantage of being treated with courtesy."

"Now that this beautiful piece of work is done," said Chang, "may I hope that you will come to Shanghai?"

"Yes, I will be ready to go to Shanghai to-morrow," said Pearl. "Also I think we should discuss the matter so that there is a proper plan. Tell me what it is that you wish me to do."

"That is soon told," said Chang eagerly, looking around carefully to see that the servants had resumed their work and were now out of earshot. "All that you must do is to tell the truth, omitting nothing."

CHAPTER XV

GORDON BURNSIDE leaned back in his swivel chair with a sigh of relief, the first he had uttered for many weary weeks. He had been living under a great strain, sparing himself nothing in order to secure the conviction of Kung. Every time he went into the street Burnside fancied he heard mocking laughter, and there were times indeed when this was more than mere fancy. All Shanghai and far beyond knew how he had been found asleep in a field with his house stripped of everything, while the final jest of all—his belongings being delivered to Mrs Burnside in far away Aberdeenshire, was too rich to be ignored.

Now, having heard through an interpreter, so as to save all possible chance of misunderstanding, the damning chain of evidence against Kung, he envisaged a time, not too distant, when Kung would begin to pay dearly for the crime of having made a fool of Gordon Burnside. The company's lawyer, a certain Mr Keppel, who had listened to the statements of ex-Detective Chang, Pearl, her brother and her servant, said judicially: "Upon the facts I cannot see any difficulty about obtaining a conviction. Nevertheless, I would advise you to prevent any possibility of the witnesses being got at by Kung in the time elapsing between arrest and trial. Also, don't let these people go until their statements have been signed and witnessed. With these in your possession you have only to turn the whole matter over to the police."

While the four witnesses were waiting for the statements to be written out, they were regaled in a waiting-room with tea and cakes. Burnside, meanwhile, his fingers drumming impatiently upon the desk, sat in his own office.

"Why are we being kept here?" asked Pearl, who was weary of the long-drawn out questioning.

"The statements are being written out and we are to sign them," explained Chang.

"What foolishness!" exclaimed Pearl.

"It is the custom," said Chang soothingly.

An hour elapsed before the statements were laid out on the desk in Burnside's office. "It is understood, is it not," said Mr Keppel through the interpreter, "that you made these statements voluntarily? That you do not have to sign them unless you wish to?"

"It is understood," said a chorus of four voices.

Chang took up a brush and signed his statement forthwith, making a grand flourish. Pearl took the brush from his hand.

"Don't you think," urged Keppel, "that you should read the statements before signing them?"

"I am sure," said Pearl demurely, "that an honourable person like yourself would not make any false statement for us to sign."

Mr Keppel, not long out from England and accustomed to a procedure in which the outward forms played a vastly important rôle, was shocked by the careless way in which Pearl, her brother and her servant signed the lengthy documents. He was, none the less, greatly pleased by the gracious little speech which had been accompanied by a no less gracious smile.

"How long must I wait before the man Kung is in prison?" asked Pearl, her gentle smile turning to an expression of narrow-eyed bitterness.

"Not long!" replied Burnside, the bite of his teeth being audible to all in the room, while his jaw muscles swelled visibly.

"It was foolish of him to make an enemy of a great man such as yourself," said Pearl.

Burnside, not unpleased, grunted. Mr Keppel smiled in deprecating fashion with the manner reserved for his wealthier clients. Indeed, of all those in the room, only Chang, his view of humanity jaundiced by his all-pervading cynicism, saw anything but sweet simplicity in these girlish remarks.

"I don't think you need me any more," said Mr Keppel when he and Burnside were alone.

"You think the police are bound to act now?" asked the latter anxiously.

"It is my considered opinion, Burnside, that they have no choice in the matter. It can now be left in their hands. It will be better that way because you, if you will excuse me saying so, show a certain personal bias and, shall we say, eagerness."

"Good God! Haven't I enough to give me a personal bias? You wouldn't be so damned judicial if you'd woken up in a blasted field to find your house stripped of every damned thing."

"Forgive me," said Mr Keppel gently, "but that is a quite unproven matter. Nothing, so far, connects Kung with it."

Burnside's sense of triumph conquered his ill-humour and within seconds of the lawyer leaving his office he was speaking to Willoughby on the telephone, and within a few more seconds he was on his way to the latter's office in the Central Police Station.

"These," said Willoughby slowly, after looking up from a brief perusal of the statements which Burnside had slammed down on his desk viciously, "seem pretty conclusive."

"Considering that I've done the work you're paid to do," said Burnside, "you don't strike me as very grateful, or enthusiastic."

"I'm not," was the cool reply. "I'm not at all sure that you'll be enthusiastic for long. Have you contemplated what's likely to happen when Kung is arrested?"

"I'm interested in seeing Kung put away for a long term of imprisonment," snapped Burnside. "We got along well enough before he came on the scene and we'll get along well enough when he's breaking stones."

"In the language of the weather reports, the arrest of Kung is going to create a low-pressure area in Shanghai," said Willoughby reflectively. "When a low-pressure area is surrounded by high-pressure areas the result is what we call a typhoon, here on the China coast. If I were you, Burnside, I'd take these statements away and sleep on it. Kung isn't a fool. Take it from me, he's very well informed. If he had not wanted those statements made, they wouldn't have been made. With Kung under lock and key, I don't feel somehow that the insurance business is going to be very profitable."

"Listen, Willoughby, I didn't come here for advice. I've

brought you evidence which justifies you in applying for a warrant for Kung's arrest on charges you can formulate from the available evidence. If you won't act, then I'm going over your head."

"Go over my head, and be damned to you! I won't take the responsibility of applying for a warrant against a man of Kung's standing on statements which, it wouldn't surprise me to learn, were obtained by bribery from an absconding policeman, a convicted pickpocket, a half-witted girl and a servant maid who's probably frightened out of her wits. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm busy."

Willoughby felt better when Burnside, breathing threats, left the office. Burnside's whole attitude showed that he was actuated more by private malice than public spirit. It was no longer a war between foreign insurance companies and a man who was showing them to be largely superfluous, but the private war of a man who had been humiliated and wanted his revenge. Policemen, no matter where they may be, do not like being used as instruments of private malice.

Acting on impulse, Willoughby reached for his private telephone, which did not pass through the Police Exchange, and asked for the number listed in Kung's name. Kung himself answered the call.

"What a strange coincidence!" said the voice at the other end. "Quite anonymously, of course, I was about to telephone you—for some advice."

"It is to give you some advice that I telephoned," said Willoughby. "Perhaps on the same matter. The advice I have to give you is that, to save yourself any needless discomfort, you take a brief leave of absence from your duties."

"How long an absence would you suggest?" asked Kung.

"Merely until to-morrow morning. Then, having heard that certain persons were inquiring for you, what more natural than to call here at, say, ten o'clock to see *me*? It might also be as well this evening to communicate with friends, wealthy friends, if you understand me."

"Friends who might in certain circumstances be prepared to put up large bonds? Is that it?"

" That is it," replied Willoughby.

" Your advice is good. I will take it. I am most grateful. Good-bye ! "

Willoughby was thankful now that he had never confided in Burnside, or anyone else, Kung's private tragedy of opium addiction, or Burnside would be sure to pull every string to oppose bail being granted. That a warrant would be issued he had no doubt. Equally, he had no doubt that the International Mixed Court, before which Kung would appear, would assess bail in a very large sum.

Some people called it intuition, others just a hunch, but whatever its name, it had enabled Willoughby to climb a long way up the ladder. It now told him in warning tones that things were not as they seemed, unless Kung were a very much less astute man than he believed him to be. Kung must have known every step Burnside had taken, from the very moment he had left for Hankow. He must have known, therefore, of the nature of the testimony which could be brought against him. It would have been simplicity itself for Kung to have spirited these witnesses out of the way before, or even after, Burnside got them. That he had not done so suggested to Willoughby strongly that he was not at all alarmed.

What Willoughby did not know, however, was that Kung, too, was relying upon this thing which is called intuition.

The issuance of a warrant on a private complaint was unusual, but in view of the importance of the interests represented by Burnside, it was not long delayed. Willoughby neither assisted nor hindered the process. Prudence dictated that he should sit on the fence.

* * * * *

The most surprised man in Shanghai was Burnside when the news reached him in the morning that Kung had voluntarily surrendered himself at the Central Police Station. For the first time it shook his faith in the strength of the case against Kung, whom he had expected to seek refuge outside the International Settlement, if only to cause delay while the witnesses were terrorised into amending their statements. Kung, as Burnside well knew, had many friends among highly-placed

Chinese officials, with whose help proceedings might have been drawn out for months, if not years.

The preliminary hearing of the charges against Kung was set for the same afternoon at the International Mixed Court. Dr Soong-li, for the defence, made no demur when the damning statements were put in as evidence, waiving insistence upon the offering of any further evidence.

In the absence of the usual Police Prosecutor, Mr Keppel, briefed by Burnside on behalf of the insurance interests, asked for an adjournment of one week.

Dr Soong-li rose to state that he agreed to the adjournment. "These wild charges have taken my client by surprise, and, except for the formal plea of not guilty, I will make no further reference to them to-day. There remains only the question of whether the Court, in view of the fact that this is a private prosecution, will release the defendant on his own recognisances, or will set bail. I may add that bail in any amount the Court may set is available here and now."

"What is the police attitude?" asked the British Assessor, nodding towards Willoughby, who was there in the capacity of a spectator.

"The police have no attitude," replied Willoughby, "but since bail in substantial amount is forthcoming, it would seem the prudent course to set it at a high figure."

"I oppose bail," said Keppel firmly. "While the defendant is at liberty he may tamper with the witnesses."

"The same might be said of any defendant in any cause, Mr Keppel," said the British Assessor mildly. "Unless you can strengthen your objection by positive evidence that the defendant has tampered, or threatened to tamper, with witnesses, I shall fix bail in the sum of ten thousand dollars, which, bearing in mind that the defendant surrendered voluntarily, seems adequate to ensure his appearance a week hence."

Kung gave no indication of the relief which swept over him. A week without opium, in the confinement of a prison cell, would have made him a madman, and there had been the possibility that bail would have been refused.

At the rear of the Court sat ex-Detective Chang, Pearl and her brother. They looked unhappy, especially when they saw

Willoughby, accompanied by two policemen, bearing down upon them as the Court adjourned.

There were loud clicks and then Chang and Pearl's brother looked down upon handcuffed wrists.

"Those are my witnesses," protested Keppel. "Why are they being molested?"

"Chang," said Willoughby, "is a deserter from the police. This man"—he nodded towards Pearl's brother—"has two warrants out against him for theft. They will be at your disposal when you require them. You ought to thank me, since you are so scared that they may be tampered with. I'm going to put them where nobody can tamper with them for a week."

"I promised them they wouldn't be touched if they returned to Shanghai," said Burnside with fury.

"Then you had no authority to make any such promise," retorted Willoughby, signing to the constable to remove the two men.

Pearl, meanwhile, sat quite unmoved by events, concentrating upon a piece of delicate embroidery which, as Kung strode past, she shook out so that he could see it. There was only time for a brief glimpse, but time enough for Kung to recognise, restored to its erstwhile perfection, the cushion cover which Pearl in a fit of blind rage had almost destroyed. This alone was remarkable enough, but less explicable was the look of something almost approaching serenity which shone from the girl's face. Pearl did not cast her eyes in his direction, but Kung read what she evidently wanted him to read: that in all this bother and commotion she was quite undisturbed.

Unreasonably, Kung felt annoyed. This girl, whose lovely face and body had in the past tortured so many of his waking hours, had always lacked the least hint of mystery. The workings of her shallow mind had, he believed, been an open book to him, to be read at will in the unlikely event that there were anything worth reading. Serenity, such as he now saw on what had once been a baby face devoid of character, came from within. Whatever they were, it showed that Pearl had solved her perplexities, and was resolved on a certain course of conduct. What course? Time alone would reveal that.

Kung was not in the least afraid of Burnside being able to

secure a conviction He had not yet read the signed statements, copies of which would be made available to Dr Soong-li, but he knew without reading them of the damning omissions which they must contain, omissions which, in the hands of a man like Dr Soong-li, would destroy their credibility.

Pearl, he was sure, had not confessed that the robbery had been a conspiracy between her brother and herself. Under cross-examination she would fail completely to explain how she had not recognised her brother. Alternatively, if the brother were not to figure as the robber, what evidence was there that a robbery had taken place? If no robbery had taken place, then the charge of compounding a felony fell to the ground.

Then, since there had been no felony to compound, what was all this nonsense about kidnapping? Pearl and her brother and her maid had taken shelter in his house on the Grand Canal. The *laodah* and crew of the houseboat who had taken them thence would not, for obvious reasons, talk. If these three had been held forcibly, how was it that ex-Detective Chang had been able to go to the house and, without the smallest opposition from anyone, bring them to Shanghai to testify? Seen in this light—which was the light in which Dr Soong-li would make the Court see it—the case was absurd. In order to discredit Chang it was not necessary even to accuse him of attempted blackmail. Doubtless he would say that he had been bribed to leave Shanghai, but who would believe such a statement from the lips of a sworn officer of the law who, on his own confession, had foresworn his duty for private gain?

The thing was laughable. Kung's only anxiety had been lest the Court, impressed by the formidable charges, should refuse bail during the week which would elapse before the case came to trial. That, as he well knew, would have been disastrous. That worry was now behind him.

None of this perfectly logical argument, however, explained why Pearl, the lovely little guttersnipe, looked so serene and mistress of herself, nor why she had brought to the Court to flaunt in his face the restored cushion cover whose restoration had been a penance. To be in character, as Kung knew her, having committed the act of defiance, by making a damaging

statement against him, she ought, as a further act of defiance, to have torn the cushion cover to shreds. Unless she sought to hurt him, why make the statement to be used against him? Having made it, why the painstaking way of showing him that she had in fact completed her penance?

It was all so utterly and foolishly illogical. Forthwith, Kung dismissed the matter from his mind. There were so many, vastly more important, matters than the vagaries of an ignorant girl's behaviour.

* * * * *

With Kung's arrest and subsequent release on bail, Shanghai tensed itself for whatever might happen. Only in the Central Police Station was this tension not apparent.

"I'd like a report," Willoughby's superior told him, "of your special precautions in the event of trouble."

"None, sir!" replied Willoughby briefly.

"The insurance interests are pressing for special precautions. This fellow Burnside is raising hell."

"In my opinion, sir, no special precautions are necessary."

"You seem pretty sure of yourself, Willoughby! It wouldn't go too well with you, you know, if something did start. What about when Kung is convicted?"

"Kung won't be convicted, sir!"

"I presume you know what you are saying, Willoughby, but you've got to be right. I think it only fair to tell you that Burnside accuses you, in so many words, of being—well, Kung's man."

"The implication being," said Willoughby evenly, "that Kung has bought me? Is that it?"

"You put it bluntly, man, but that's about it. Speaking to you as a friend, Willoughby, your neutral attitude over this case is bound to give rise to such ideas."

"For a week, sir," said Willoughby, smiling, "I don't mind what anyone thinks. Then I shall be content to let the facts speak for themselves. You've never met Kung, have you, sir?"

"No, and I doubt whether I ever shall. Frankly, Willoughby, I don't share your views. I don't care for the way Burnside

has set about things, but I think he has a very strong case, strong enough to put Kung out of circulation for a long time."

"If Kung should happen to be convicted, sir," said Willoughby earnestly, "there are no special precautions I am capable of taking to prevent chaos and anarchy here. If I thought that would happen, sir, I would urge you to convince the Council of the need to have sailors and marines landed from the foreign warships in the port. With the lifting of Kung's control of the criminal element in Shanghai, sir, the police force could not cope with what followed."

"Are you completely crazy, man? Are you putting this forward as a reason why Kung should not be convicted? Can't you, or won't you, see that if Kung is as powerful as you seem to believe, it's a situation which has got to be faced and the sooner the better? The foreign powers are not going to knuckle under to a man like that."

"Burnside won't secure a conviction, sir, because I don't believe that he has the necessary evidence. I'm not advocating that we do anything to influence the result of the trial. I don't believe Kung requires any help from us, or anyone else. Let us take Kung's acquittal for granted, sir, at least for purposes of this conversation. If he is acquitted, then his prestige is going to rise enormously. Prestige and power are much the same thing—especially here. We want that power on our side, sir, not against us. That is why I have taken care not to involve the police in this case. This is something between the insurance nterests and Kung. Let them fight it out while we stand aside."

"Then what?"

"This is China, sir. We are mere interlopers. We both know how rotten and ineffective most Chinese institutions have become, but here is one which isn't rotten and ineffective, and it will only become so *if it is allowed to become too powerful.* Kung's is the kind of organisation which thrives on opposition —like the Jews. Kung's way isn't our way, sir, but he arrives at the results we want, if by a different route. I've spent a long time on Kung's trail. There was a time when I, too, wanted to put Kung behind bars, because I was afraid of him and

because I thought he was just one more Chinese bandit. Now, there are only two things I'm afraid of where Kung is concerned: one of them is to see him become too weak . . ."

"And the other?"

"To see him become too strong, sir. I'm not an educated man, but I read somewhere once that great power corrupts. It would corrupt Kung. But while I'm here I'll see that he does not have great power. I hold the whip hand over Kung, sir, in a way that I will not repeat, even to you. I can control him, see that he doesn't get out of hand. My job, as I see it, is to help maintain law and order and to co-operate with anyone out to do the same."

"Within the law, Willoughby, within the law!"

"Within the law, sir! I'm a servant of the people of Shanghai, not the agent of a few insurance companies. Kung and his Society feed, clothe and shelter men who would otherwise become criminals. His way is preventive. It's realistic, because it goes to the root of the problem. What do the insurance companies offer in its place? They don't care a curse about the human tragedies which lead to crime. To them it's a mathematical problem without a spark of humanity in it. There's still room for them in Kung's world, because, no matter what Kung may achieve, there will always be thieves. But there isn't room for Kung in a world as insurance actuaries would have it. If Kung's Society is rotten, it will fall apart of its own rottenness. . . ."

Willoughby, suddenly abashed at his own vehemence, paused from sheer embarrassment.

"I'm afraid, sir, I'm talking too much. In short, when I get back to my desk I'll send you up an undated resignation, but for a week at least I'd like your word not to use it."

"Go on, man, go on! You're just beginning to interest me. I've sometimes wondered whether you were human, or just a policeman. Why haven't you ever said all this before?"

"Because I wasn't sure, sir. Because, too, there's no place in official reports for matters like this. How long would I have lasted if I had come out openly in favour of Kung and against the insurance interests? Not long, sir. You know that."

The other nodded weary assent. "And now what?"

"At this present moment Kung is feeding nearly twelve thousand mouths. Your guess is as good as mine, sir, as to what would happen if he—for any reason—ceased to feed them."

"Don't bother about that resignation, Willoughby. You've convinced me—convinced me at least that you are honestly convinced. Whether you are right or wrong, the next week will show. I hope, for both our sakes, that you are right, because if you are wrong I suspect we shall have an opportunity of discussing matters on the next homeward-bound steamer."

* * * * *

Mr Keppel was having one final talk with his witnesses, who sat uncomfortably on a wooden bench in a private room at the International Mixed Court. He was a conscientious man, sincerely out to see justice done. He was averse, therefore, to any suspicion of coaching witnesses. Nevertheless, there was one weak spot in the evidence, and this, before going into Court, he wanted to repair.

"I want you to realise," he said through an interpreter, "that Dr Soong-li is a very astute man, who will try to trip you in any way he can. He will try to fluster you and make you contradict yourselves. You must guard against that. Now you," he said, turning to ex-Detective Chang, "have testified that, although the room was darkened and the man lying on the floor in the house of the girl, Pearl, was gagged and his face concealed, you were able to recognise him at once. How do you explain this?"

"I have seen Kung many times," replied Chang. "Besides, after I had searched the house and when the room was light I saw him without any covering on his face."

"But to that Dr Soong-li would say at once that it might have been a different person who had entered the house while you were upstairs."

"If he were to say that," said Chang stoutly, "he would be a great liar."

"That is true," said Mr Keppel, "but he might be believed.

What then? Is there not some other thing you could have recognised on *both* occasions? Something about his clothes?"

"One black silk gown is very much like another black silk gown," replied Chang.

"I think I can help in this matter," said Pearl. "I have just remembered that the man Kung had struggled so hard to release himself from the bonds that his gown was lifted to his knees. A little below his right knee was a deep scar as though at some time he had been cut with a knife. I remember it clearly."

"Of course," said Chang with a smile. "I, too, remember it. How foolish of me to have forgotten!"

"I also remember it," said Pearl's maidservant.

"And I, too," echoed Pearl's brother.

"But," said Mr Keppel, turning to the young man with an angry glare, "you were not even there, so how could you have seen it?"

"I saw it," said Pearl's brother, "after the detestable man had kidnapped me and my sister and taken us to his house beside the Grand Canal near Soochow."

"Ah!" said Mr Keppel with relief in his voice. "Do not forget that when you are asked about it in Court. It was clever of you," he added, turning to Pearl, "to have remembered that. Because of it you may be sure now that Kung will be punished. But say nothing of it until you are asked."

"I hope the punishment will be very severe," said Pearl, her eyes flashing with fury.

"You may be sure of that," replied Mr Keppel, wondering at the hatred this young and lovely girl bore for Kung. "I will see you in Court in a few minutes." He hurried out to share the good news with Burnside.

In the court-room (for it wanted some twenty minutes to the hour set for the hearing) there was a buzz of conversation. In one corner sat Kung, who had just surrendered to his bail, talking to Dr Soong-li.

"I wish," the latter was saying, "that I shared your supreme optimism. The brother is the key to it, but in his statement he does not admit being in his sister's house. If he admits to being there, then he convicts himself as the robber."

"My learned friend," said Kung airily, "I refuse to be worried. A sparrow came into my window this morning and chirped to me."

"That may convince you, but will it convince the Court? There's another thing: why won't you testify?"

"For two reasons," replied Kung. "The first is that I have a sublime faith that all will be well, and the second is that I dislike telling lies. If I go into the witness-box, my friend, I must tell lies."

"But why?" asked Dr Soong-li impatiently.

"Because, my friend, there *was* a robbery. I am guilty, therefore, of compounding a felony. Also I did arrange for both these young people to remain out of Shanghai and enjoy my poor hospitality. But these things have to be proved against me, and, with your skilled assistance, I do not believe they can be proved. Be sparing where the girl is concerned. The situation was of my creation. But spare the brother nothing. He is an unpleasant youth. He is a coward, too, and will be unable to sustain his lies, and he must lie for the reason that he dare not tell the truth. Heaven, my friend, does not love liars."

There was no time for more, for at that moment the magistrate and the British Assessor entered the Court, which was packed with spectators. There were no juries at the International Mixed Court.

Dr Soong-li entered a formal plea of not guilty to the charges and left proceedings in the hands of Mr Keppel, who called ex-Detective Chang. Under Mr Keppel's careful guidance the witness's replies adhered closely to the written statement.

"Do you wish to cross-examine?" the Assessor asked Dr Soong-li.

"If you please, sir!"

Chang looked so virtuous that cross-examination seemed almost unkind.

"Do you wish," Dr Soong-li asked Chang, "to make any changes in the evidence you have given in this Court? Are you satisfied that, in accordance with your oath, you have told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"I have told the truth. I wish to change nothing."

"You understand the meaning of an oath?"

"I do."

"Have you ever sworn falsely?"

"No."

"When you became a detective, were you not called upon to swear that you would do your duty faithfully?"

"I was."

"Do you consider that you have done your duty faithfully?"

"Yes. I ran away because I was frightened."

"Frightened of what?"

"Of this man Kung."

"Why, before you went away because of your fear of the respected Kung, did you not, in accordance with your oath, make a report of this matter to your superiors?"

"I was frightened."

"You admit that you made no report?"

"Yes."

"Then you are lying, are you not, when you say that you have never sworn falsely? You swore to do your duty, yet you admit that you neglected to do your duty, because it was a part of your duty to make report of such matters. Therefore you are a liar, convicted out of your own mouth. If you lied in one respect, how can you be believed in others?"

To this there was no answer.

"Since my question evidently embarrasses you," continued Dr Soong-li, "we will pass over it, allowing the Court to construe your silence as it pleases. Let us return to the time when, according to your statement, you answered the maid-servant's scream for help and entered the house of the young woman known as Pearl. What was the approximate time of this?"

"A few minutes before six o'clock in the morning."

"Was it light or dark?"

"It was almost dark."

"Had you ever seen the defendant before?"

"Once, riding in his carriage."

"And although he was gagged and it was almost dark, you at once recognised him?"

"Yes."

"You could not possibly be mistaken?"

"No."

Dr Soong-li wished he had not pursued the matter. His first attempt to shake Chang's credibility had been successful. He should have left it at that.

"If the Court pleases," said Mr Keppel, looking very pleased with himself, "I would like to recall the witness Chang. His credibility has been called into question and I would like an opportunity of supporting it."

Reluctantly Chang returned to the witness-box.

"Will you tell the Court," said Mr. Keppel, "whether it was only by recognising his face that you were sure the man lying on the ground was the defendant Kung?"

"I recognised his face," replied Chang stubbornly, clinging like all liars to the shreds of truth.

"But was there nothing else? Let us admit that you *might* have been mistaken about a man's face in a dim light."

"I was not mistaken," persisted Chang, and then he remembered. He was by this time angry at the suggestion that he was lying when, if he lied in all else, he was now speaking the truth. "But when I entered the room the man Kung who had been struggling to loose his bonds, was lying with his gown above his knees. I saw upon his right knee a deep scar."

"Have you seen that scar since then?"

"No."

"Would you recognise it again?"

"Yes."

"That is all, thank you."

Dr Soong-li darted a quick look at Kung, whose face betrayed nothing.

"There would seem to be a very simple method," said Mr Keppel smoothly, "by which the witness's credibility may be put to the test. I think the point made by counsel for the defendant is well taken. The witness might have been mistaken as to the defendant's face, but it is hardly likely that he could have been mistaken regarding the defendant's right knee. It would seem, therefore, that by exposing his knee to the Court—privately, if he prefers it—the defendant can set at rest any doubts as to mistaken identity."

Kung sat immobile and expressionless. Dr Soong-li was too good a tactician to refer the decision to Kung. He knew, nevertheless, that he must show a bold face, or the Court would interpret matters in its own fashion.

"This is too much," he protested. "It is surely enough that my client has to face a series of trumped-up charges—which he is ready and willing to face—without having to undress in Court in order to bolster the evidence of a prosecution witness. The prosecution has made these absurd charges. Let the prosecution substantiate them—without help from the defendant."

"Nevertheless, Dr Soong-li," said the British Assessor mildly, "I am bound to remind you that it was you who cast doubts on the witness's credibility. Mr Keppel's suggestion, therefore, is not so unreasonable as it may sound. If the defendant dislikes the idea of exposing his knee to the public gaze—and I understand his reluctance—I am sure the matter could be arranged without offending his—er—understandably delicate susceptibilities. He has, of course, the right to refuse. But this Court has the right to interpret his refusal in any way it pleases."

"The defendant," said Dr Soong-li stoutly, "is not here to prove his innocence. The prosecution is here to prove his guilt. Let it do so. I am quite satisfied," he went on with a confidence he did not now feel, "that this trumped-up case, which the police would not touch with the proverbial barge-pole, will collapse without subjecting my client to any further indignities."

Mr Keppel protested mildly at the use of the expression "trumped-up", at which the Bench delivered a mild rebuke to Dr Soong-li, whose convincingly belligerent and indignant manner to a small extent offset the bad impression created by Kung's refusal to show his right knee.

Pearl's brother, called to the witness-box, told the Court of having been kidnapped in Hongkong and of finding himself, uncounted days later, in Kung's house beside the Grand Canal. He testified further to having seen the scar on Kung's right knee while the latter was climbing a ladder to tend his roses. He was a shifty, unreliable witness, whose word carried little conviction.

"What," asked Dr Soong-li in cross-examination, "were you doing in Hongkong when you were thus brutally kidnapped and brought to Soochow?"

Unable to explain the truth, that he had gone there to dispose of the stolen jewels, he faltered: "I had certain business in Hongkong."

"What business and with whom?"

"After the sufferings I endured, I do not remember."

"At what address in Hongkong were you staying?"

"I do not remember."

"Tell us the details of this kidnapping, please. How and when did it occur?"

"Men came in the night . . ."

"How many men?"

"Three, or perhaps four."

"It is strange, is it not, that you can remember the number of men who kidnapped you, but you cannot remember why you were in Hongkong?"

The witness hung his head.

"I suggest to you," said Dr Soung-li severely, "that you were never in Hongkong in your life."

"I was in Hongkong."

"How long were you there?"

"Three weeks or more."

"Then, if you are speaking the truth, give the Court the name and address of one person—just one—who can verify that you were in fact there."

"I do not remember names."

"Yours," said Dr Soong-li with a shrug, "would seem to be a most peculiar—and convenient memory."

Mr Keppel, deciding that Pearl was his most spectacular and most convincing witness, reserved her until last. His one hope was that she would not ruin the effect of her damning evidence by revealing her venomous feelings towards Kung. Judges tended to discount the evidence of over-eager witnesses.

The maidservant, very much frightened, told her story of finding Kung and her mistress bound on the morning in question. She was completely sure that the man was Kung. She had accompanied her mistress to Kung's house beside the

Grand Canal and was quite frank in saying that where she was concerned no compulsion had been used. Her mistress, however, had been unwilling.

There was a ring of truth about the girl's evidence. She had not relied upon the scar on Kung's right knee to identify him, for she knew him well as a frequent visitor to the house. She had, nevertheless, observed the scar. Dr Soong-li waived cross-examination.

The Court then adjourned until the afternoon. The feeling was general that, despite the unreliability of the first two witnesses, things looked bad for Kung.

"This matter of the scar on your knee is serious," said Dr Soong-li to Kung. "Why did you not mention the matter to me?"

"I did not know that the witnesses would mention it," replied Kung. "Do not look so alarmed, my friend," he added. "The little sparrow did not lie to me this morning when he sang to me of a happy conclusion to the day."

"Then I wish that you could arrange for the little sparrow to conduct your defence," retorted the lawyer. "It is all very well attacking the credibility of witnesses, but it lacks conviction when you refuse to take the obvious way of proving that they are liars. Heaven above knows what the girl Pearl will say this afternoon. She is young and beautiful and, unless her lies are too transparent, she will be believed."

"I have an idea that the girl's evidence will be interesting," said Kung. "I await it with pleasure."

CHAPTER XVI

THE crowd which thronged the precincts of the Court and the immediately adjoining streets had little concern with the details of the legal battle being fought within. It was drawn from all classes of the population. Some came because Kung was a well-known and, for the most part, well-liked figure. Others because here was a chance to see for nothing an equally famous character, Pearl of the Morning, to see whom in a place of amusement was very costly. There was a third, and more serious, group of people, which regarded the case as a trial of strength between two opposing schools of thought and two widely divergent ways of life. Most of these regarded Kung as a victim of foreign intrigue, for it was well known throughout Shanghai that the funds for investigation and legal expenses came from the coffers of foreign insurance companies which found Kung's welfare work among the criminal classes responsible for loss of profits and were resolved, therefore, to have him put into prison, where he would cease to be an annoyance. That Kung was technically guilty as charged they did not for an instant doubt.

In the eyes of the crowd, therefore, Kung was a martyr. More, he was a patriot, as the word was understood in a disunited China, for anyone who caused serious embarrassment to foreigners at that time easily earned the title.

During the noon recess those engaged in the case had been unable to leave the Court precincts for lunch, for the tight-packed crowd without had grown sullen and immovable. There was none of the to-and-fro surge which keeps most crowds fluid.

"I think, sir," said a uniformed Inspector to Willoughby, some thirty minutes before the Court was due to resume the hearing, "I'd better telephone for a couple of hundred extra

men to be sent there. The crowd's in an ugly mood. God help us if Kung's convicted. They'll tear the place down."

"I wish it would rain," said Willoughby, looking hopefully at the sky; "a good shower of rain would do more good than two thousand men. It's your responsibility, but if you're asking for my advice, don't send for any men. A show of force would inflame, rather than soothe, this crowd."

"You know," said the Inspector, "according to what I've heard, Kung has five hundred men in the crowd. Perhaps that explains why he looks so damned unconcerned. He must know that he's going to be convicted and is relying on his men to get him away. Personally, I wish I was somewhere else."

Willoughby, although he did not say so, feared now that this was uncomfortably near the truth, and passed the intervening minutes in lugubrious soliloquy. If this were to happen it would, as he knew, mark the end of his own career, for he would stand convicted of a monumental, almost catastrophic, piece of bad judgment. In the circumstances, he would be lucky to get his pension. Deciding that this was an unprofitable and morbid subject, Willoughby returned to the Court-room, where the atmosphere was tense.

Forcing his way through the packed court to the entrance reserved for the Magistrate and Assessor, Willoughby found the latter in his office, gazing moodily out of the window and quite evidently resenting the intrusion.

"You'll have to excuse this informality," he began, "but I've come to make an unusual request."

"Well?" said the Assessor, making the monosyllable as chilly and uninviting as only an Englishman with a judicial training could make it.

"If you reach a verdict to-day," said Willoughby, "and if that verdict should be one of guilty, I beg you not to announce it until to-morrow, or I can't be responsible for what happens."

"Meaning precisely what?"

"That the crowd is quite likely to rush the Court and rescue Kung. Also the consequences to you and the Chinese magistrate might not be too pleasant."

"I am not in the habit of allowing my own personal comfort

or safety to influence me in making judicial decisions," was the cool reply. "If you cannot keep order, that is your affair. You have, I would imagine, at least two hours in which to take the necessary precautions. Furthermore, I consider your approach in this matter highly improper and shall so inform the Commissioner. If I were the kind of person to be influenced by fears for my own safety, your approach could be construed as an intervention on behalf of the defendant."

"I haven't had any lunch either," said Willoughby, leaving the Assessor to his thoughts.

In the body of the Court, Kung, who shared with Pearl the centre of attraction, was laughing gaily at some remark made by Dr Soong-li. His was not the demeanour of a man who, a few hours hence, might be sitting in a steel-barred cell fighting a losing battle against a craving for opium and knowing all the while that just around the corner lay madness.

Burnside, by contrast, sat biting his nails furiously, glaring from time to time in the direction of Kung as though the mere sight of him was an offence. To Willoughby's eye Burnside looked too fine-drawn. He was showing signs of the drink to which, in these last months, he had resorted to calm his nerves. His mouth was slack and wet-lipped.

Pearl, oblivious of the hungry and lecherous eyes which bored into her from all sides, sat calmly eating some sticky confection from a paper bag. She was dressed with unusual quiet good taste, in black trousers and a tunic of beige satin, and without any jewellery. Her maidservant sat beside her, too overcome to speak.

The ex-Detective Chang and Pearl's brother, closely guarded by two constables, looked unhappy. From time to time they cast resentful looks in the direction of Burnside, as the author of their present misfortune.

Then a hush fell over the Court as the Magistrate and the Assessor came in and took their seats upon the bench.

Resuming proceedings, Mr Keppel called Pearl to the witness-box. As with his previous witnesses, he asked Pearl whether she identified her signature upon the statement which he proposed offering as evidence.

"That is my signature," she agreed after a close scrutiny.

" You are," said Keppel, thinking the question would please her, " the renowned entertainer known to millions as Pearl of the Morning ? "

" I am," was the smiling reply.

" The defendant Kung was a frequent caller at your house, was he not ? "

" He came there perhaps six times."

" On these visits did he make violent protestations of his love for you ? "

" He asked me to share his bed, if that is what you mean."

A Court official created laughter by calling for silence when there was already silence, making it plain that he had expected the reply to cause amusement.

" Do you recognise this card ? " asked Keppel, holding up an ornately decorated card covered with Chinese script.

" Yes, that is the card which the respected Kung sent to me with roses from his garden."

" And you still state that he did not make violent protestations of love to you ? "

" No, he did not," was the demure reply.

" I will ask the Court Interpreter to read aloud what is written on the card and signed by the defendant Kung. Perhaps that will refresh your memory."

The interpreter then read several lines of an erotic poem dictated to Pearl of the Morning.

" What do you say to that ? " asked Keppel. " Do you remember that poem now ? "

" I think," said Pearl with a strange expression on her face, " that it is very beautiful, but I never heard it before."

" But a moment ago," said Keppel, now thoroughly perplexed, " you recognised the card. Now you say that you have not heard the poem before."

" There was nobody to read the poem to me," said Pearl sadly. " I am, you see, a very foolish and ignorant girl," she faltered. " I was not taught to read or write."

" But we have just seen your signature upon the written statement you made."

" That is only a signature I learned in order to put it upon my photographs, which I sell for one dollar each."

"Now," said Keppel, hastily changing the subject, "we come to the night of the robbery at your house, when all your jewels were stolen and certain other jewels, the property of a certain Lok-wen. Will you tell the Court in your own words the circumstances of the robbery."

"There was no robbery."

"But that is absurd," protested Keppel. "In your statement there are three pages devoted to details of the robbery."

"I do not know how to read or write, so how could I have made the statement?"

"You are here to answer questions, not to ask them," said Keppel severely.

"Nevertheless, Mr Keppel," said the British Assessor, "the question is a very pertinent one. I make no doubt that it will be asked in cross-examination, so we may as well get to the bottom of it now."

"The witness is manifestly hostile," protested Keppel. "I see no further purpose in pursuing the examination."

"Nevertheless, Mr Keppel," continued the Assessor inexorably, "you have offered in evidence a long written statement signed by a witness who now declares—and I have no reason to doubt her—that she cannot read or write. This Court wants to know a great deal about the circumstances in which this statement was signed."

"I have finished with the witness," said Keppel in despair.

"I think," said Dr Soong-li, "that I can satisfy the Court's understandable curiosity upon this point in cross-examination. I confess to a great curiosity myself."

"The witness is yours," said the Assessor, relaxing.

"Do you not know," began Dr Soong-li benignly, "that it is a very dangerous and imprudent thing to sign a document without reading it first?"

"If you say so," replied Pearl, "I am sure it is so. But I could not read it before I signed it."

"Then why did you sign it?"

"Because that man"—she pointed to Burnside—"told me to sign it."

"Your brother also signed a statement, did he not?"

"Yes, but there were fewer sheets of paper."

" Can your brother read and write ? "

" That I cannot say, but he could not six months ago."

" Did this gentleman "—Dr Soong-li pointed to Burnside —" offer any inducement, or make you any promise if you would sign the statement ? "

" No," replied Pearl demurely. " The five thousand dollars was to be given to the man Chang."

" I assume," interposed Dr Soong-li, " that in face of these disgraceful disclosures the trumped-up charges against my client will be dropped. I ask the Court formally to acquit Mr Kung "

There was a brief exchange between the Magistrate and the Assessor, inaudible to the rest of those present.

" This Court," said the Assessor at length, " does not propose to be stampeded into a hasty decision. The witnesses have stated unequivocally that they saw the defendant Kung, together with the present witness, bound and gagged on the floor in the latter's house, and that when released they both spoke of a jewel robbery which had taken place. The next we hear of these witnesses, as well as the girl Pearl, is that they are in the house of the defendant at Soochow and out of the jurisdiction of this Court. Granting the irregularity of the methods by which statements were obtained from the witnesses, there is, none the less, *prima-facie* evidence that a robbery did take place and more than a suggestion that the facts were suppressed by the defendant, or his agents. There is the further suggestion that the witnesses were removed against their will, which is in effect the crime of kidnapping with which the defendant is charged. Lastly, the defendant has created a bad impression by refusing a perfectly simple method of proving whether these witnesses have or have not told the truth about the alleged robbery. In the interests of the defendant, as well as justice, there are certain matters which should be probed further. Let us hear what the witness Pearl has to say regarding this scar on the defendant's right knee."

" I protest at the prolonging of my client's ordeal," said Dr Soong-li hotly. " The prosecution is already so discredited by its own witnesses that the trial has become a farce. Common justice demands my client's immediate acquittal."

" Common sense, Mr Keppel, demands that your client

submit his right knee for examination. If, as you so stoutly claim on his behalf, he wishes to vindicate his honour, he can do so by proving conclusively that three witnesses are liars. His refusal to do so cannot fail to be construed as significant."

Dr Soong-li's righteous indignation was awful to behold. Even if Kung were to exhibit his scarred right knee, it was still practically impossible for him to be convicted, but a bad impression would be left. This, as a good fighting lawyer, he was anxious to avoid. So he went on fighting, as he said, for a principle.

Suddenly, in the midst of a heated exchange with the Assessor, Dr Soong-li became aware of a slip of paper on the table in front of him. As he read it, his eyes popped with amazement.

"My client," he announced somewhat pompously, "realising that certain delay and inconvenience are being caused to the Court, has agreed to exhibit his right knee. He asks me to explain that his previous reluctance is founded upon a Chinese gentleman's innate dislike of bodily exposure. He now realises that his personal disinclination is of less importance than the dignity and convenience of this honourable Court."

With slow, deliberate movements, conscious that every eye was upon him, Kung lifted his black silk gown until his right knee was clearly visible. The throng in the room pressed forward to see, but all they saw was a knee devoid of a scar.

"The witnesses," said Keppel weakly, "might have been mistaken between the right and the left knees."

"The fact is," retorted Dr Soong-li, believing that his opponent had hit upon the solution of the mystery, "that they were unanimous in saying it was the right knee. I protest against . . ."

Nobody was listening. All eyes were turned towards Kung, who, after lowering his gown and concealing his right knee, was rolling it up on the other side to expose the left knee, also devoid of any scar.

It was several whole minutes before order was restored, as gust upon gust of laughter swept through the Court.

"Is it too much," asked Dr Soong-li, "to ask that my client be allowed to leave the Court a free man without any stigma on his character?"

" The defendant is acquitted of all charges," said the Assessor hastily, after consultation with the Magistrate. Whereupon they left the Court.

With a smile on his face, Kung walked deliberately across the Court to where Burnside sat huddled, almost in collapse.

" The time has come, Mr Burnside, for you to join your household belongings in Scotland. There is no longer any place for you here in China," he said in tones which were heard by many people. His voice as he spoke was very gentle. " You have never understood us, so it is better that you should go—now."

* * * * *

Kung's new silk gown of royal blue looked sumptuous and somewhat out of place in Willoughby's spartan office. Its graceful line heightened the man's own grace of bearing, heightening, too, by contrast the hard-wearing, practical nature of Willoughby's grey tweed suit.

" Well, what can I do for Shanghai's great hero ? " asked Willoughby with a friendly grin.

" Unless my illustrious ancestor was sadly mistaken, you should regard me with suspicious eyes. The existence of heroes is not only unhealthy, but it proves, if proof be needed, the stupidity of the common people, in whose disordered minds heroes are created. But to answer your question, I am come to find out whether we are friends, or enemies."

" We are, I trust, friends," replied the policeman.

" Are we also allies ? "

" That is more difficult," said Willoughby, " also I do not think you stand in need of allies. Shall we say that I am a benevolent neutral ? "

" Your benevolence in my behalf makes me very happy, Mr Willoughby. I was already aware of your neutrality. Since we are quite alone, however, would it be indiscreet to ask just why you remained neutral in the recent deplorable disagreement ? "

" I am glad that you asked, for it was my intention to tell you, Mr Kung. I remained strictly neutral because, you see, I knew you were guilty."

"From one of your calling," said Kung with a laugh, "that is a strange statement."

"Not so strange, perhaps, if you will trouble to follow my mental processes. Although I knew you were guilty, I also knew that you would not be proved guilty. I was able, too, to bring myself to look at things through your eyes—Chinese eyes. There was nothing I could do, even if I openly allied myself with Mr Burnside and his friends, to influence the result of the trial. Had you been found guilty and sentenced, as you would have been, to a term of imprisonment, it would have given me no satisfaction whatever. On the contrary, knowing what we both know, I should have grieved for you. My grief, because I like you, would have been personal, but I would have grieved in my official capacity, for your departure to a prison cell would have left a dangerous and deplorable vacuum. It would have destroyed something without building up anything in its stead. That is always bad.

"Equally, as I was sure that by some method best known to yourself, you would not be convicted, I thus avoided the embarrassment of being on the losing side. Seeing things through your eyes briefly, I came to the conclusion that I would do as you had done, for you must admit that the great Kung would have looked extremely foolish if the truth concerning the jewel robbery had ever come out. However, all has turned out well. You were acquitted triumphantly and are the hero of the hour. I, because all Shanghai knows that I stood studiously apart, share in some of your reflected glory. Have I answered your question?"

"You have answered it with complete frankness, so I will ask another question, which I have asked before: are we allies, Mr Willoughby?"

"No, Mr Kung, we are not allies. If I were to become your ally, I would not be true to my salt. While it remains benevolent, I wish nothing but good for the Greater Shanghai Benevolent Society and its respected President, but if it steps one yard beyond the line which divides benevolence from other activities, I have the means to destroy its President. You know, better than I, what would then happen to the Society."

"I cannot complain of lack of frankness, Mr Willoughby," said Kung, his eyes flashing dangerously. "Be a little more frank, please, and tell me just how you define this dividing line."

"You and your Society must not become too successful, Mr Kung. Otherwise, instead of rendering a great public service, you become a public menace."

"You mean that you do not wish to see crime suppressed? That is a strange thing for a policeman to say."

"It may sound strange, but I do not say it without thought. It is better to have a few small criminals at large committing a few small crimes, than to have a great city like this altogether free of crime merely because one man wields too much power. I do not say necessarily that you would misuse that power. I believe you would try sincerely not to do so. But I do not believe that any man in history, given great power, has ever failed to misuse it. You might be the exception, Mr Kung, but it is a risk that I have no right to take.

"Because this is China and because the people understand your methods, there is room for you here. There is also room for the Western way of life, although it is believed that the Eastern and Western ways cannot live in peace alongside each other. It is not so if each way is represented by men of good will. I," said Willoughby, holding out his hand, "am a man of good will. If you are also, let us prove that these others are wrong."

Kung gripped Willoughby's outstretched hand and smiled. "I think, Mr Willoughby," he said mischievously, "that you are a civilised person. From a Chinese, especially a Chinese with my illustrious lineage, that is a very high compliment."

"Let me ask you, Mr Kung, since we are being frank, just how valid is your claim to descent from the Great Sage?"

"The Great Sage, Mr Willoughby, counselled his disciples and followers against the sin of boastfulness. I would be lacking in respect to my illustrious ancestor's clearly-expressed injunction if I were to reply to you." Kung rose to his feet and prepared to leave the office.

"I hope we shall meet again soon, Mr Kung," said Willoughby cordially.

"A great desire has come upon me for a few days' rest in my humble home beside the Grand Canal," said Kung. "But before I leave Shanghai I have pressing personal affairs which require my attention. I am, although perhaps you do not know it, a very poor man, so it is with the purpose of increasing my small fortune that I intend to make a few investments. My old friend Quong, the compradore of the Shanghai General Insurance Company, tells me that in his opinion the shares of that company are greatly undervalued on the Stock Exchange. Now that the somewhat obstinate Mr Burnside has decided to retire to the peace of his native Scotland, I am persuaded to believe that restored public confidence in the shares will be reflected in higher prices. I am very ignorant of these matters, Mr Willoughby, but my good friend Quong assures me that this is so. I do not value money very highly, for I am a man of simple tastes, but if this judgment of affairs should prove a right one, I shall be very happy, for I am contemplating certain somewhat extravagant personal undertakings."

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The strain of the previous days had been very great, the greater if only because Kung had disciplined himself not to reveal his mental stress. It was with a sigh of relief, therefore, that he stepped from his houseboat into the peace and tranquillity of his rose garden beside the Grand Canal, although in the dead of Winter there were no roses to gladden his eye.

It was the rule of this little home that when the master came and went there were neither greetings nor farewells. "My heart is here always," he explained to his servants.

The gardeners, therefore, continued their work as though unaware of his presence, sweeping up great piles of dead leaves, burning them to fine ash and scattering the ashes among the roses. The air was fragrant with the scents of burning autumn leaves. There was a great sadness everywhere in the garden, for it was at that time in the dead of Winter when the beauty of Summer has been forgotten and the promise of the Spring is not yet apparent. Here and there on the surface of the Grand Canal there floated thin sheets of ice. The scene was infinitely sad, according well with Kung's own reflective mood. He

was a lonely man, weary of the large affairs in which his life was set. "I am going," he had said to his nephew, "to hide myself from the urgencies of little thieves."

In the living-room of his house Kung coughed at the fumes from a newly-lit charcoal brazier, but huddled near it for warmth, for there was a dank chill within the walls. It was late afternoon and the light was fast draining from a heartless yellow sky. It was a relief when the servant who brought him tea paused to light a hanging lamp and draw heavy curtains.

Rising from his crouched position before the brazier, Kung went round the room, lighting all the lamps, hoping that they would chase away his own gloom. When all were alight and the wicks turned down so that they did not smoke the chimneys, Kung turned to observe with interest a piece of fine embroidery which he had not seen before. It depicted a sailing barge, gay with a russet sail, while on the far bank of the canal, brought several miles nearer, was the Great Pagoda of Soochow.

So great was Kung's concentration upon this lovely piece of work that he became oblivious of his surroundings. For whole minutes he remained like one entranced. Here before him, drawn finely in coloured silks, was the carefree life of the Grand Canal, which, since earliest childhood, he had always envied. Realising that such a life was not for him, Kung sighed deeply, applying his faculties to the sheer loveliness of the work itself. When at last he turned away it was to see Pearl, a bowl of tea held cupped in her two hands, standing beside him.

"I would be very proud," he said, turning from her to her work, "if my clumsy hands were capable of making a thing of beauty such as that."

"The credit is not mine," said Pearl demurely. "Credit belongs to the respected Kung, who taught me that to see beauty and to make beauty are more important than being beautiful."

"Ah!" said Kung as understanding dawned on him. "But what are you doing here? What of the thousands in Shanghai who clamour to hear Pearl of the Morning sing her songs? Your place is there, where fame and fortune await you."

"The respected Kung—it is written in the signed paper

which nobody would believe—brought me here to this quiet place by force. If he wishes me to leave, he must use force again to compel me."

"I shall not use force," said Kung gently, "for, indeed, I find that I have no strength left."

To conceal the tears which would not be denied, Pearl poured herself out a bowl of tea, while Kung reclined upon a couch sipping his own. Then, with a gesture of humility which was foreign to her, she sank to the floor at his feet.

"How long have you been here?" Kung asked at length.

"I came here straight from that awful place, the Court. I wanted to be here when you arrived so that"—she giggled—"I could bandage the terrible scar on your right knee."

"That," said Kung severely, "is something I do not profess to understand. Somewhere, I suspect, deeply buried in your conscience, is a most reprehensible deceit. I prefer to know nothing of the matter."

"Please do not use such long words, for I am only a foolish and ignorant girl!"

THE END